



# HALLOWE'EN SPECIAL

THE HEXHAM HEADS CELTIC CURSES AND WANDERING WERE-SHEEP  
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DARK TOURISM FROM GRAVEYARD JAUNTS TO DEATH CAMP VISITS

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A HALLOWE'EN  
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FORGOTTEN PAST

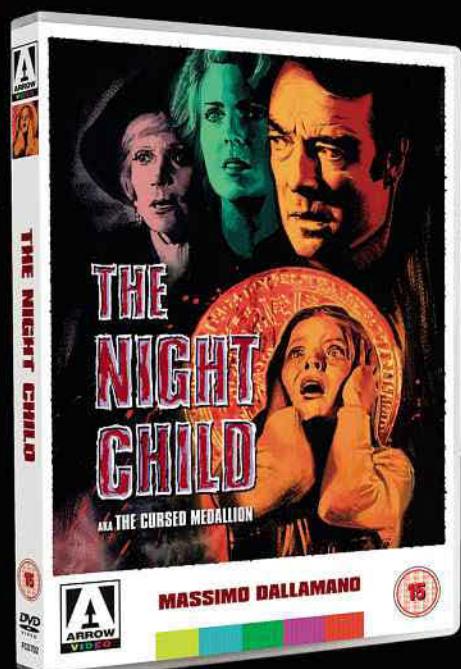
## PAUL THE PSYCHIC OCTOPUS

MIND-READING  
MOLLUSC ON THE  
MOVIE SCREEN

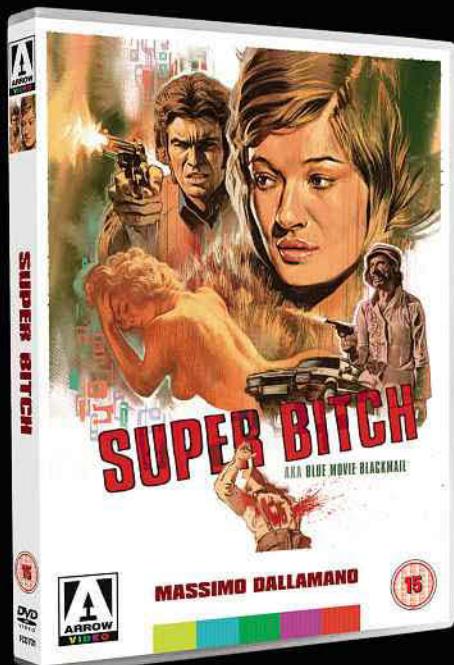
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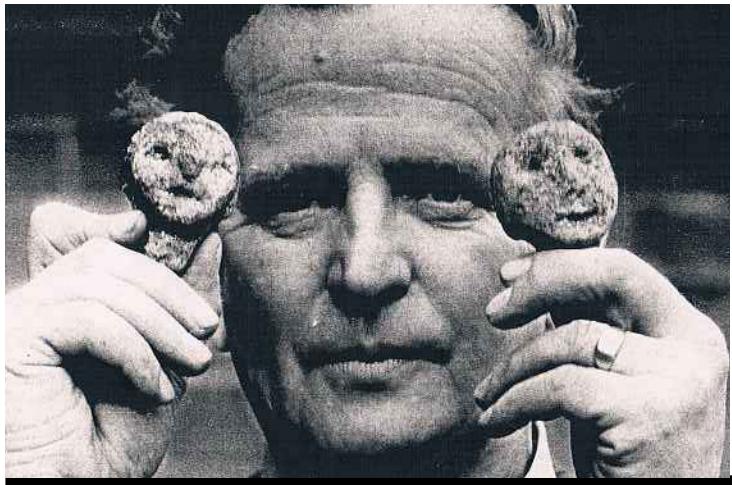
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CESAR MANSO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



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The life and times of Paul the Psychic Octopus



ORRIN HARE

MAIN COVER IMAGE: COURTESY OSSIAN BROWN / JONATHAN CAPE

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## 42 IN SEARCH OF THE HEXHAM HEADS

In 1977, Paul Sreeton went to the Northumberland town of Hexham to investigate a bizarre case involving stone heads, Celtic scholarship, poltergeist phenomena and werewolves. 40 years on, STU NEVILLE joined Paul as he retraced his steps. Could the mystery at last be solved?

## 48 OCTOPUS ORACLE

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# editorial

## The dark is rising

**A Hallowe'en Time Machine**

As we put this issue to bed, autumn has definitely arrived. There's a nip in the air; the nights are drawing in; it's time to have a look at the Fortean Towers woodpile.

It also means that Hallowe'en is nearly upon us. And while this fact will mostly be made manifest in gaudily-coloured displays of plastic tat in your local supermarket, and the now-annual debate about whether the festival is a) too commercialised b) too Americanised c) dangerously Pagan or d) a licence for teenage hoodlums to run amok, we would like to take the opportunity to lead you back in time to a gentler, homelier, but infinitely more disquieting time, before plastic pumpkins and rubber bats were the order of the day. We invite you to step inside the Hallowe'en time machine of Ossian Brown and to travel back to a time of dark, backwoods magic and a forgotten, American surrealist vernacular in a selection of photographs from a truly astounding collection...

And if that isn't enough to make your

Hallowe'en a special one, then join Stu Neville as he persuades veteran forterian Paul Sreeton to revisit one of the spookiest of all forterian mysteries, the case of the Hexham Heads, consider the current state of ghost hunting with John Fraser and take a holiday in other people's misery with Sophie Collard as she enters the Institute for Dark Tourism Reesearch.

All this plus the Highgate Vampire, Weird Weekend, and a new documentary about Paul the Psychic Octopus...

**Goodbye to all that...**This month we have to say a sad but fond farewell to not one, but two members of the *FT* team.Owen Whiteoak will be well known to many readers as a stalwart of the magazine since 2000, when he first came on board as picture researcher. On fact, Owen's involvement with *FT* had started long before that; he'd been a regular clipster ever since being recruited by Ian Will in the 1980s (at a Grateful Dead gig, we seem to remember).

For many people, Owen has been a friendly and helpful point of contact over the years, whether as a voice on the telephone, an email contact, or via exchanges on the Fortean Times Message Boards, where he would always be ready with advice or

information for anyone who needed it.

With an active background in SF fandom, a great love for the music of the Grateful Dead (among others), a formidable fund of knowledge that encompassed everything from astrophysics to American politics, Owen brought lots of unique qualities to *FT* – but most important was his total commitment to the magazine and its readers.

If a scientific question arose at Fortean Towers, then Owen would be the one with an answer (while the rest of us just tried to look as if we understood it). If a back reference was needed – when did we last run something on the Hexham Heads? – Owen was our man, the facts seemingly at his fingertips on every occasion. Quite how we'll manage without him is anyone's guess, but we wish him all the best for the future as he floats serenely into the fabled world of early retirement...

We also say goodbye – at least as a regular team-member – to Nick Cirkovic, who – as many of our Twitter and Facebook followers will know – did a great

job getting the daily news online each morning. Nick first stepped into the leopard-skin pumps of our web mistress and picture researcher Jen Ogilvie when she ran away to Cambodia in 2011. While the shoes never suited him, he did make better tea and kept us entertained with his ongoing battle with his lunch, a daily saga of disappointment, disenchantment and near-despair that became a highlight of most working days at Fortean Towers. Happily, though, Nick will be staying on with us as a regular reviewer – so, expect to see his name continuing to crop up in these pages.

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

*"I assumed he was with you"*

**Why forterian?**  
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

**SEE PAGE 76**

HEIGHTS OF PERIL.  
DEPTHES OF DARKNESS.  
THE SAGA CONTINUES...



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# strangedays

## Our Lord & his lady wife?

A fourth-century papyrus suggests that Jesus was married, but doubts remain over its authenticity

A fourth century papyrus fragment with a text in (Egyptian) Sahidic Coptic appears to offer evidence that Jesus was married. The faded fragment, 4cm by 8cm (1.6in x 3.1in), has a text scattered across 14 incomplete lines (eight on one side, six on the other), translated as follows: "not [to] me. My mother gave to me li[fe]"; "The disciples said to Jesus"; "deny. Mary is worthy of it"; "Jesus said to them, My wife"; "she will be able to be my disciple"; "Let wicked people swell up"; "As for me, I dwell with her in order to"; "an image"; "my moth[er]"; "three"; and "forth which".

The words are the first to show Jesus referring to a wife, according to Karen King, Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, who presented the finding on 18 September at the International Congress of Coptic Studies in Rome. "One of the things we do know is that very rarely in ancient literature was the marital status of men discussed," she said. "Silence in marital status is normal... This fragment suggests that some early Christians had a tradition that Jesus was married." The earliest assertion that Jesus *didn't* marry is from AD 200. Early Christians disagreed on whether they should marry or be celibate.

Prof King believes the script is probably a copy of a Gospel written in Greek in the late second century AD, as it bears similarities to recently discovered texts from that period, such as the Gospels of Thomas, Mary, and Philip. Of course, it doesn't prove that Jesus was married or that, if he was, that his wife was Mary Magdalene. Only women were identified in terms of family



KAREN L KING / HARVARD UNIVERSITY

relationships, as someone's sister, mother, or wife. Historians believe that the text, already being called "The Gospel of Jesus's Wife", was written by members of the Gnostic sect, which questioned whether Jesus was both human and divine, and which was later condemned as heretical. The prominence given to Mary Magdalene in the Gospels, as the first witness to the Resurrection, has long fired speculation about her role. However, New Testament scholar Ben Witherington points out that the word 'wife' was sometimes used by Gnostics to signify a non-sexual relationship with a woman.

The provenance of the fragment is unknown. Prof King was shown it in 2010 or 2011 (accounts differ) by an unnamed collector who wanted help in its translation and analysis. He said he acquired it from a German in 1997. It came with a 1982 letter from the late Peter Munro, professor in Egyptology at the Free University in Berlin, stating that

### "Rarely was the marital status of men discussed"

his colleague, Prof Gerhard Fecht, believed it was evidence that Jesus was married. It has only been studied by a small circle of experts in papyrology and Coptic linguistics, who attested to its authenticity. These included Roger Bagnall, Director of the New York-based Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, and Anne Marie Luijendijk, a New Testament scholar from Princeton. The latter said the fragment fits all the criteria established by the International Association of Papyrologists, and noted that papyrus fragments frequently don't have a provenance, simply because so many were

removed from Egypt before such issues were of concern.

Prof King and her collaborators are eager for more scholars to weigh in and perhaps upend their conclusions. There are already dissenting voices, such as Stephen Emmel, a professor of Coptology at the University of Münster who was on the advisory panel that reviewed the 2006 discovery of the Gospel of Judas. "There's something about this fragment in its appearance and also in the grammar of the Coptic that strikes me as being not completely convincing somehow," he said. Another participant at the Rome congress, Alin Suciu, a papyrologist at the University of Hamburg, was more blunt. "I would say it's a forgery. The script doesn't look authentic" when compared to other samples of Coptic papyrus script dated to the fourth century, he said.

"Jesus said to them, 'My wife...' by Karen L King; [AP] [incredipedia.info](http://incredipedia.info), 19 Sept; *D.Telegraph*, [artdaily.org](http://artdaily.org), *examiner.com*, 20 Sept 2012.



### BIRD-MUDA TRIANGLE

One of our pigeons is missing – well, more than one  
**PAGE 11**



### BEYOND OUR KEN

Corrie's Bill Roache: the happy end-times prophet  
**PAGE 17**



### SENSITIVE FLOWERS

Do plants have nervous systems and feel pain?  
**PAGE 18**



BARNESLEY CHRONICLE

# It's got his name on it

Weapons expert finds a gas mask addressed to himself

A weapons expert was astonished to find three World War II gas masks in his new house, including one with his name on.

Richard Midgley, 40, had only been in the property at Mount Place, Barnsley, Yorkshire, for a fortnight when he made the discovery. He moved back to Barnsley after 23 years in the Army, serving as a regimental sergeant major with the 22 Signal Regiment, and training soldiers in weaponry.

"There was a leak in the bathroom, so I went into the roof space and found some boxes in the corner. I wondered what they were," he said. "I dragged them out and saw they were gas masks. When I looked closely there was one that had my name on and this address. I thought, 'That's weird'. I know Midgley's a Yorkshire name, but it's

not that common. The eerie thing is our spelling is the less common one too. People I've told said it's really spooky. I'm not superstitious, but I did think it's quite strange."

The gas masks were dated October 1937. One was addressed to Irene Midgley and the third to Mrs H Mallison at the same property, which was built about 1902. Mr Midgley, a father of two whose parents and two sisters still live in Barnsley, said he didn't believe they were related to the gas mask owners. "It's funny because I used to instruct lads on nuclear, biological and chemical warfare," he said. "Obviously, there have been technological advances, but the principles are still the same."

He said he would consider giving the gas masks to a museum. *Barnsley Independent*, 15 Aug 2012.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES  
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### Caterpillars won't vomit in public

(Bristol) Eve. Post, 9 April 2012.

### Girls Commit Suicide in Attempt to Travel Back in Time

KTLA News (Los Angeles), 12 Mar 2012.

### Fluorescent Millipedes Discovered on Alcatraz

The Bay Citizen (San Francisco), 22 Mar 2012.

### Sex-starved fruit flies turn to drink

BBC News, 15 Mar 2012.

### Jesus in sexism row

The Oxford Student, 17 May 2012.

### How the Vampire Squid sucked the world dry

D.Mail, 16 Mar 2012.

### NAPLES MAN ARRESTED AT BANK CLAIMS HE'S CIA DIRECTOR, HALF ORANGUTAN

Naples Daily News (Florida), via Irish Independent, 25 Feb 2012

### Maps cited as reason for drop in teen pregnancies

Hull Daily Mail, 22 Mar 2012

### Keep eyes open when walking dog

Hull Daily Mail, 2 Mar 2012

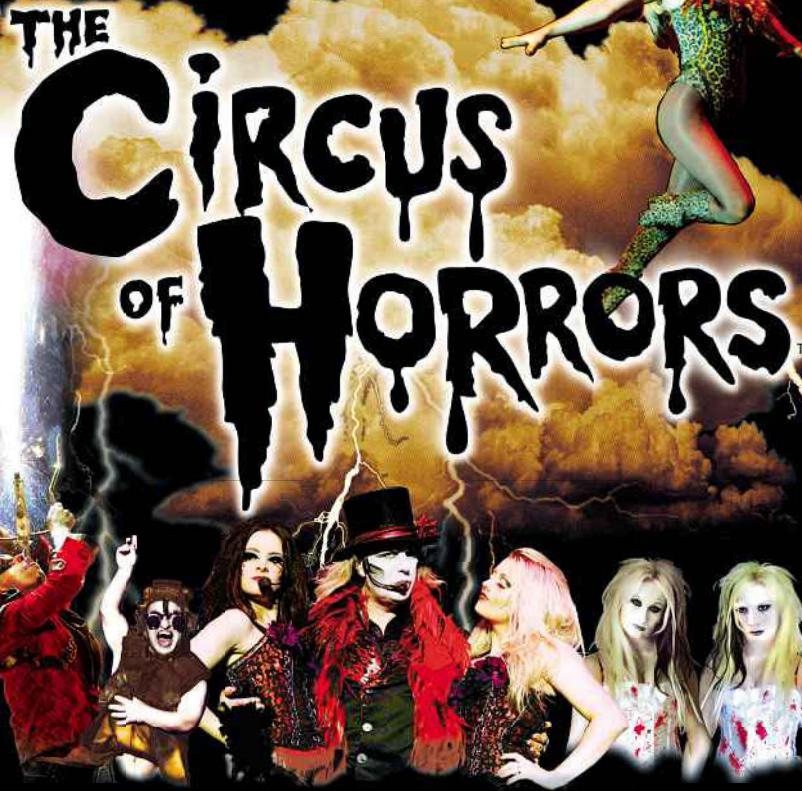
## PILLAR OF FIRE

Stretching 100ft (30m) into the sky, this fire tornado is one of nature's rarest and most intimidating phenomena. It was photographed by film company boss Chris Tangey, 52, who was scouting for movie locations in Alice Springs, Australia. "The weather was perfectly still and it was 25 degrees Celsius [77°F] – it was an entirely uneventful day," he said. "I was about 300 metres [328 yards] away and there was no wind, but the tornado sounded like a fighter jet. My jaw just dropped. I've been shooting in the outback for 23 years and I've never seen anything like it."

The fire tornado – a raging swirl of heat and wind also called a fire devil or fire whirl – occurs when a column of warm rising air meets a wildfire. On the few occasions they have been documented, they lasted about two minutes. "This one kept going and going for 40 minutes," said Mr Tangey. "The whole experience was staggering." The phenomenon has been known to inflict terrible casualties. In 1923, for instance, a fire devil that occurred during Japan's Great Kanto earthquake killed 38,000 people in just 15 minutes. *mirror.co.uk*, 17 Sept; *Metro*, 18 Sept 2012. PHOTO: CHRIS TANGEY / SWNS



# THE CURSE IS COMING!



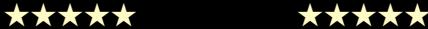
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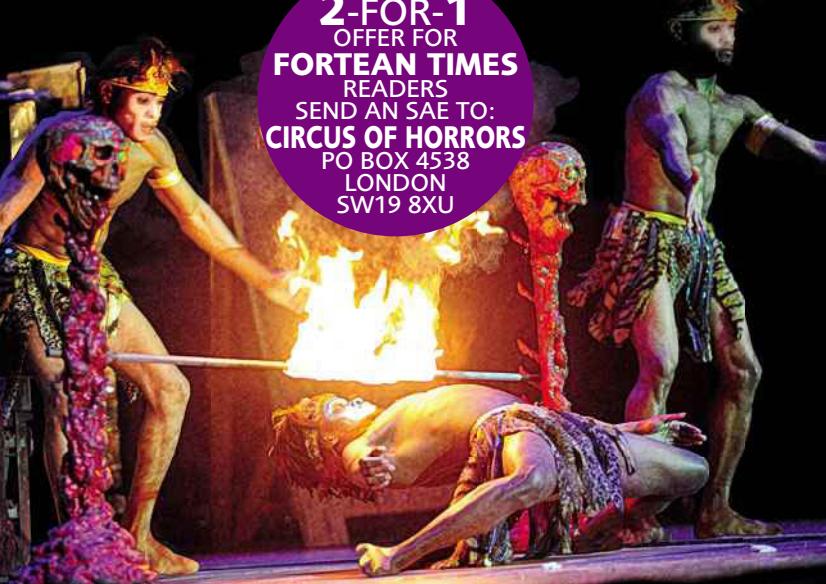


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City Varieties Music Hall		cityvarieties.co.uk		enjoyeastayshire.com	
Blackpool	Wed 31 Oct to Sat 3 Nov	0871 222 9090	Glasgow King's Theatre	0844 871 7648	Mon 28 Jan
The Globe Theatre Pleasure Beach Resort		blackpoolpleasurebeach.com		atgtickets.com/venues/kings-theatre	
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Galway Black Box	Tues 6 Nov	091 569777	Stafford Gatehouse Theatre	01785 254653	Wed 30 Jan
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		playhousewhitleybay.co.uk		colstonhall.org	
Scunthorpe Baths Hall	Tues 13 Nov	0844 854 2776	Mansfield Palace Theatre	01623 633133	Fri 8 Feb
		scunthorpetheatres.co.uk		mansfield.gov.uk/palacetheatre	
Coventry Belgrade Theatre	Wed 14 Nov	024 7655 3055	Dunstable Grove Theatre	01582 602080	Sat 9 Feb
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Newark Palace Theatre	Thurs 15 Nov	01636 655755	Dartford Orchard Theatre	01322 220000	Mon 11 Feb
		palacerewnewark.com		orchardtheatre.co.uk	
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Redhill Harlequin Theatre	Fri 30 Nov	01737 276500	Margate Winter Gardens	01843 296111	Sat 2 March
		harlequintheatre.co.uk		margatewintergardens.co.uk	
Gravesend The Woodville Halls	Sat 1 Dec	01474 337774	Epsom Playhouse	01372 742555	Sun 3 March
		woodville.co.uk		epsomplayhouse.co.uk	
<b>2013</b>					
Bromley Churchill Theatre	Thurs 10 Jan	08448 717620	Northampton Royal and Derngate	01604 624811	Mon 4 March
		ambassadortickets.com/Bromley		royalandderngate.co.uk	
Crawley Hawth Theatre	Fri 11 Jan	01293 553636	Preston Guild Hall	0845 344 2012	Tues 5 March
		hawth.co.uk		prestonguildhall.com	
Pool Lighthouse	Sat 12 Jan	0844 406 8666	Telford Oakengates Theatre @ the place	01952 382382	Thurs 7 March
		lighthousepoole.co.uk		theplacetelford.com	
Hornechurch Queens Theatre	Sun 13 Jan	01708 443333	Llandudno Venue cymru	01492 872000	Wed 6 March
		queens-theatre.co.uk		venuecymru.co.uk	
Potters Bar Wylyotts Theatre	Mon 14 Jan	01707 645005	Sheffield City Hall	0114 2789 789	Fri 8 March
		wylyottscentre.co.uk		sheffieldcityhall.co.uk	
New Wimbledon Theatre	Tues 15 Jan	0844 871 7646	Newcastle Mill Volvo Tyne Theatre	0844 493 9999	Sat 9 March
		ambassadortickets.com/wimbledon		millvolvotynetheatre.co.uk	
Yeovil Octagon	Wed 16 Jan	01935 422884	Burnley Mechanics	01282 664400	Sun 10 March
		octagon-theatre.co.uk		burnleymechanics.co.uk	
Swansea Grand Theatre	Thurs 17 Jan	01792 475715	Motherwell Concert Hall	01698 403120	Tues 12 March
		swanseagrand.co.uk		motherwelltheatre.co.uk	
Swindon Wyvern Theatre	Fri 18 Jan	01793 524481	Dundee Whitehall Theatre	01322 434940	Wed 13 March
		wyverntheatre.org.uk		whitehalltheatre.com	
Manchester Opera House	Sat 19 Jan	0844 871 3018	Aberdeen Music Hall	01224 641122	Thurs 14 March
		manchesteroperahouse.org.uk		boxofficaberdeen.com	
Liverpool Empire Theatre	Sun 20 Jan	0844 871 3017	Falkirk Town Hall	01324 506850	Fri 15 March
		liverpoolempire.org.uk		ticketweb.co.uk	
Sunderland Empire	Mon 21 Jan	0844 871 3022	Halifax Victoria theatre	01422 351158	Sat 16 March
		sunderlandempire.org.uk		victoriatheatre.co.uk	
Hereford Courtyard Theatre	Wed 23 Jan	01432 340555	Bridlington Spa Theatre	01262 678258	Sun 17 March
		courtyard.org.uk		thespabridlington.com	
Stoke Victoria Hall	Thurs 24 Jan	0844 871 7649	Southsea Kings Theatre	023 9282 8282	Tues 19 March
		ambassadortickets.com/Victoria-Hall		kings-southsea.com	
Wolverhampton Civic Theatre	25 Fri Jan	0870 320 7000	Jersey Opera House	01534 511115	Thurs 21-Sat 23 March
		wolvscivic.co.uk		jerseyoperahouse.co.uk	

Venues with a symbol also sell tickets via **ticketmaster**  
**0844 499 3666** [ticketmaster.co.uk](http://ticketmaster.co.uk)

## SIDELINES...

### UNETHICAL

Terry J Davis was arrested for stealing a textbook entitled *Resolving Ethical Issues* from a university medical centre in Louisville, Kentucky, and trying to sell it at a local bookshop. *Courier-Journal (Louisville, KY)*, 30 July 2012.

### FOOD WARNING

On its Facebook page, a Salafi group called the Popular Egyptian Islamic Association has warned Muslims against eating tomatoes because a shape resembling a cross is revealed when the 'Christian food' is cut in half. The message went on to say: "There is a sister from Palestine who saw the Prophet of Allah in a vision and he was crying, warning his nation against eating [tomatoes]." *Hurriyet Daily News (Turkey)*, 21 June 2012.

### MINORITY REPORT

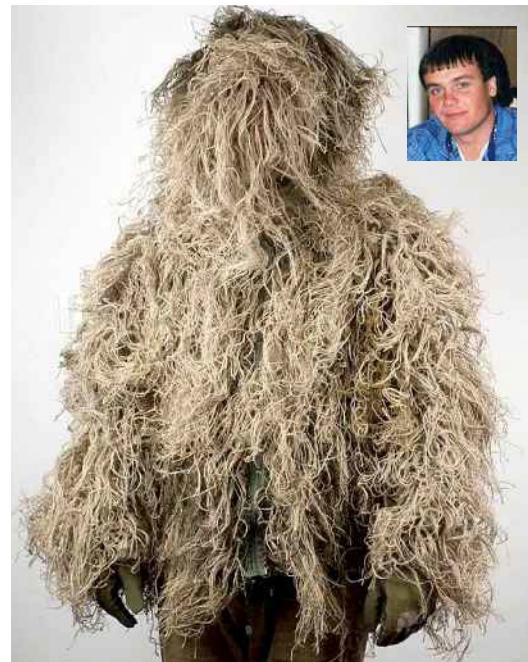
The Olympic opening ceremony in London was a "vile, inhumane satanic ritual", according to conspiracy theorist David Icke. He said that the Olympic stadium is "strategically placed on the Earth-energy grid" to tap into the energy of the shape-shifting, blood-sucking lizards from outer space who rule our planet. *The Week*, 11 Aug 2012.



MARTIN ROSS

# Sasquatched to death

One Bigfoot in the grave after hoax backfires, and a rusty ape



ABOVE LEFT: A 'ghillie' suit, as worn by the late prankster (inset). ABOVE RIGHT: The mysterious Fenland gorilla.



CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL / REX FEATURES

### BIGFOOT JOKER

A man dressed as Bigfoot in an attempt to provoke reports of a sighting of the celebrated hirsute biped in northwest Montana was knocked down and killed on the night of 26 August. Randy Lee Tenley, 44, was standing on Highway 93, south of his home in Kalispell, trying to scare motorists. He was wearing a 'ghillie' suit – a type of full-body clothing resembling heavy foliage and used to camouflage military snipers. After he was hit, a second car ran him over. Both vehicles were driven by teenage girls who were unable to stop in time.

After talking to Tenley's friends, trooper Jim Schneider explained that the dead man "was trying to make people think he was Sasquatch so people would call in a sighting. You couldn't make it up. I haven't seen or heard of anything like this before. Obviously, his suit made it difficult for people to see him." There was speculation that alcohol may have been a factor. *[AP] NY Times*, 27 Aug 2012.

- A YouTube video, seen by 400,000 people at the time of the report in August, claims to show Bigfoot running through the woods of northeast Ohio. According to a description posted by a user under the name 'HowTo101Channel', it happened last April in the Grand River area. The 38-second clip was evidently shot by someone on a motorbike or scooter. It shows a large, dark and hairy creature holding a long stick and running across a path, from left to right. The camera operator makes little sound at the sight, but swerves into the bushes with the camera before driving off. The last reported Bigfoot sighting in Ohio occurred in April 2012 near railway tracks in Mount Orab, according to local TV station WBNS. The station reported that there had been dozens of Bigfoot sightings in the last year and that they are a common occurrence in the state.

Last May, a group of high school students said they might have come close to Bigfoot during

a class project in the Idaho wilderness.

One student caught a dark, mysterious creature on video for a few seconds near Mink Creek before it retreated into the trees. "It just didn't look human-like," he said. "I don't know what that is; it's not a bear, it's not a moose or anything. It was big and bulky and black." *ABC News*, 24 Aug 2012.

### GORILLA IN THE MIST

Edward Harris was walking his dog in Witchford, Cambridgeshire, on the morning of 1 March when he came upon a 15ft (4.6m) mechanical gorilla (above) lurking in a Fenland hedgerow off the A142 between Chatteris and Ely. The creature had a number of moving parts but was in a poor state of repair, with many of its components badly rusted. Officers from East Cambridgeshire District Council were working with the police to try and establish where it had come from. *Cambstimes.co.uk*, 2 Mar; *Metro*, 7 Mar 2012.

# Bladderwrack shower

## Weatherman speculates tornado might be responsible

Following a storm on 6 August, marine algae (identified in the *Daily Mail* as bladderwrack) was found on a street in Berkeley Heath, a hamlet near Slimbridge in Gloucestershire, covering houses, gardens and cars. Engineer Dr Richard Overton, 55, and his wife Kay collected a bucketful of the stuff from their front garden. Other residents on 'The Common', an up-market lane overlooking acres of fields, also found some in their gardens. The Overtons' neighbour Steven Belton found a lot on his driveway.

Weatherman Ian Fergusson from the Met Office speculated that the algae had been picked up from Clevedon Beach in North Somerset 25 miles (40km) away. He said: "At the same time as this incident was reported, there were several thunderstorms in the area, one of which was pictured by satellites on a nearby beach. If one of the funnel clouds touched down on the beach, making it a tornado, it could have quite possibly picked up the seaweed and other debris if the tide was out and then later dumped it down the road at Berkeley Heath. It is a very strange event but it is possible. Look out for fish in your garden too."

The usual objections to anomalous showers apply: no one actually saw algae being picked up anywhere, and the fall was remarkably selective. Where was the "other debris" that Fergusson referred to? One the other hand, none of the reports mention that Berkeley Heath is only a couple of miles from the River Severn – but maybe there is no marine algae on the riverbank this far upstream. [telegraph.co.uk](http://telegraph.co.uk), 8 Aug; *D.Mail*, Metro, 9 Aug 2012.

Dylis Scott and her husband Tony were in their garage on Monica Road, Leicester, on 19 August when hundreds of tiny plastic balls fell from the sky during a storm. Mrs Scott, 70, was painting outside when she



ABOVE: Handfuls of the marine algae dumped in a Gloucestershire village.

**"It's a strange event. Look out for fish in your garden too."**



heard thunder and took shelter in the garage. "Suddenly, all these tiny bright yellow balls (above) came down with the rain, and they were hitting the car, hitting

the garage door, and shooting at me," she said. "I looked outside and all over the lawn were these yellow balls. And it was absolutely pelting down." She saw some of the balls deposited down the road, but by the next day most had disappeared. Mr Scott thought the rain had washed them away. They resembled pellets for an Airsoft or BB gun, but this doesn't explain how they ended up raining down during the storm. A Met Office spokesperson said: "Although we can't say whether this occurrence was weather-related, it is possible for weather systems to lift things such as dust and deposit them many miles away. We saw a good example of this back in May when dust from the Sahara was deposited on cars in the UK." Blue gelatinous balls rained down in Bournemouth, Dorset, on 26 January. These turned out to be sodium polyacrylate, used in gardening to improve soil – but the mystery of their arrival remains [FT286:11]. *BBC News*, 21 Aug 2012.

## SIDELINES...

### WITCHES ARRESTED

In Zimbabwe, two self-confessed witches who claim to have flown on a magical threshing basket were to undergo a psychiatric examination. They were arrested in early June after being found naked in the yard of a home in Chinhoyi, 68 miles (110km) northeast of Harare. The middle-aged women said the basket had "ditched" them there after a naked night ritual nearby. The flat winnowing basket is equivalent to a witch's broomstick in Western fable. [AP] 28 June 2012.

### WEATHER WAR

At a ceremony to introduce Iran's new chief of the meteorological department, Vice President Hassan Mousavi said the drought in southern Iran was part of a 'soft war' launched by the West. He was echoing an accusation by President Ahmadinejad last year that "European countries are using special equipment to force clouds to dump" their water on their continent. [AFP] 16 July 2012.

### NATURE BOY

Scott McKenzie, who had a huge hit in 1967 with *San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)*, died on 18 August, aged 73. In 1970 he moved to Joshua Tree, a desert town in California, "where he was often observed wandering barefoot, talking to plants". *D.Telegraph*, 21 Aug 2012.

### GRIM SPILLAGE

Witnesses thought they had stumbled on a mass murder when a pick-up truck overturned on a motorway in Luozhou, Sichuan province, southern China, spilling 16 bodies on the road. The driver turned out to be a professor from the city's medical school who'd bought the corpses of executed criminals, unclaimed murder victims and the homeless for students to use in class. Despite a few extra scratches, the bodies still ended up on the dissecting table. *MX News (Sydney)*, 13 June 2012.



## SIDELINES...

### NEW JERSEY HAILS MARY

Thousands of pilgrims visited an apparition of the Virgin Mary (resembling Mexico's Our Lady of Guadalupe) on a ginkgo tree outside a mobile phone shop in West New York, New Jersey, across the Hudson from Manhattan. The simulacrum could barely be made out in the wood grain inside an oval knot. Police were posted to separate the pilgrims and those accusing them of idolatry. *NY Post*, 14 July; *Times*, 24 July 2012.

### IRISH LOGIC

Damien Kierans crashed his car into a telegraph pole when he was three times over the drink-drive limit. His defence barrister in Drogheda, Co. Louth, pointed to garda testimony that the car was 'undriveable', while another garda countered that the engine was still running. Judge Flann Brennan dismissed the case because the car could no longer be considered a mechanically propelled vehicle (MPV). He said: "If it wasn't driveable then it wasn't an MPV, that is the law." *Sunday Times*, 17 June 2012.

### DIET OF FROGS

William LaFever, 28, survived for three weeks lost in the Escalante Desert in Utah, by eating raw frogs and roots. He was attempting to walk the 90 miles (145km) from Boulder, Utah, to Page, Arizona. A police helicopter spotted him on 12 July, sitting in a river and waving weakly. A sheriff's spokeswoman said he would not have survived another day, adding that it was some of the most unforgiving terrain on Earth. *Irish Independent*, 14 July 2012.

MARTIN ROSS



## BIRD-MUDA TRIANGLE

ANOTHER ROUND-UP OF  
PIGEON PECULIARITIES



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

This year, hundreds of racing pigeons have disappeared in a rural region of north-eastern England. The area in question is a triangle bounded by Consett, Co Durham, Thirsk, North Yorkshire, and Wetherby, West Yorkshire, and likened to the celebrated 'Bermuda Triangle' (a term coined in 1964 by fortean writer Vincent Gaddis, writing about ship and plane disappearances in the Caribbean). In the latest episode, only 13 out of 232 birds released in Thirsk on 18 August by a Scottish pigeon-racing club had made it back to Galashiels in the Scottish Borders, 100 miles (160km) away, a week later. This followed a summer in which hundreds more vanished in the same area. Keith Simpson of the East Cleveland Federation said pigeon racers across the region had all suffered massive losses since the season started in April – with many losing more than half their birds. Wendy Jeffries, president of the Thirsk Social Flying Club, said: "I just don't know what it is down to. The weather wasn't too bad around

### Signals from Menwith Hill spy base have been blamed

from Menwith Hill spy base, an electronic monitoring station near Harrogate, have also been blamed. Another suggested factor is the high numbers released within minutes of each other at weekends, resulting in different groups of pigeons sending each other off course.

Some 60,000 people are thought to keep pigeons, including 42,000 who race them, but the numbers are in steep decline and there are fears that the pastime could be extinct within a decade. The birds themselves have to contend with the growing number of attacks by peregrine falcons, sparrowhawks and goshawks.

"It is the worst year in the memory of people who have been racing for 60 years," said Darlington pigeon racer Stuart Fawcett, who has been racing pigeons for more than 30 years. "The area being talked about is very heavily congested with pigeons because the raptor problem became so great elsewhere." *D. Telegraph*, 24+25 Aug 2012. For a mass disappearance of pigeons in Sweden in 2004, see FT200:13.

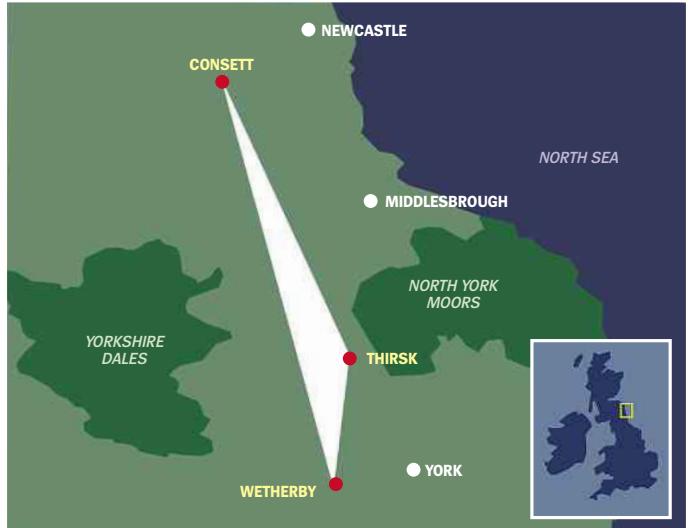
here on Saturday [18 August]. It has been an atrocious year. I am down to 10 young birds out of 29 and the people I have talked to are the same." Some fanciers are considering stopping flying the birds until they establish why so many failed to return. Interest from the Far East has pushed up the price of birds used for breeding; one sold for £209,000 to a Chinese shipping magnate earlier this year.

The disappearances have baffled experts, but the most popular theory is the abnormal number of summer showers, sending birds off course as they attempt to fly around the downpours. Unusually high levels of solar activity distorting magnetic fields and even signals



● Bernard Chambers, 75, released his prize-winning racing pigeon Percy in Fougères, Brittany, expecting him to fly the 303 miles (490km) home to Cannock, Staffordshire – but in July this year he turned up 3,400 miles (5,470km) away in Quebec, Canada, where he was found by another pigeon fancier. Billy, another pigeon released in Fougères back in 2003, turned up two weeks later 3,700 miles (5,950km) away in Staten Island, New York [FT176:29]. *D.Express*, 13 July; *Sun*, *D.Telgraph*, 14 July 2012.

On 25 May 2012, pigeon fancier Fred Lock, 59, released eight racing pigeons in Lille, northern France, expecting them to fly the 286 miles (460km) to Leeds, but only seven returned; one called Henry was missing. About four weeks later, he had a telephone call from Kate Barley to say Henry had been found 4,500 miles (7,240km) away on Eleuthera Island in the Bahamas. Ms Barley, 30, from Cleethorpes in Lincolnshire, is studying for a PhD in fisheries conservation and living on the island with her American fiancé, diving instructor Jason Kincaid – Henry flew into his boathouse. Kate said that the bird “looked in fine shape when we first saw him and seems happy here.” Her father, a pigeon enthusiast from Grimsby, 60 miles



ABOVE: The ‘Bird-muda triangle’. BELOW: Fancier Bernard Chambers in his Cannock loft.

(96km) from Mr Lock, told her how to find the owner’s phone number embedded in a wing. It is likely 16-month-old Henry will stay in the Caribbean because of the high cost of getting him home. “He must have hitchhiked on a ship to make it over there – and get away from our weather,” said Mr Lock. “I’ve heard of people finding their pigeons in Belgium, Holland and Germany, but never this far away.” Conventional wisdom states that pigeons can fly up to 600 miles (965km) a day, but need a place to rest at night; hence the scepticism about flying across the Atlantic.

*D.Mail, Sun, 21 July 2012.*

In September 2010, Darren Cubberley released Houdini in Guernsey, expecting her to fly home to Dudley, West Midlands, 224 miles (360km) away. It was her first race. More than five weeks later, she turned up in Panama City, 5,200 miles (8,370km) away, apparently in “perfect shape”. She was being looked after by Gustavo Ortiz, who was happy to keep her. *telegraph.co.uk*, 8 Oct 2010.

Officially, the longest pigeon flight is 1,173 miles (1,888km) from Spain to Ireland, but pigeons have travelled much further, admittedly without constant monitoring – one trekked 7,600 miles (12,230km) from the Shetland Islands to Shanghai in six months during 1989, and there are at least two others who have made it from Europe to China. In 1997, a pigeon belonging to Ernest Mellors turned up in Mexico City, having been released 11 months earlier in France, 6,000 miles (9,655km) away. In 1998, Boomerang, not even a racing pigeon, flew 1,200 miles (1,930km) from Algeciras in Spain to Skipton in North Yorkshire [FT240:18]. In 2008 Tyson was released in France and was expected to fly home to Telford in Shropshire, but instead travelled 3,000 miles (4,800km) south, arriving in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, three weeks later [FT205:12].

*For other epic pigeon journeys, see FT110:14.*



PETER CORNS

## SIDELINES...

### ICE METEOR

A giant lump of ice weighing over 10kg (22lb) fell from the sky at 5pm on 20 May, creating a large hole in Shiniu village, Ziyang, Sichuan province, China. It was thought to be meteoric ice. *globaltimes.cn*, 23 May 2012.

### SEX CHANGE?

Huang Li, 47, kept seven hens and a cock on his small farm at Chumiao village, Mengcheng city, in the central Chinese province of Anhui. Over the winter, his family ate all the hens, after which the cock began to lay eggs. Officials from the local agricultural ministry borrowed the bird to carry out tests. [AP] 10 Feb 2012.

### FINDING HERSELF

On 25 August, a woman described as “Asian, about 160cm [5ft 3in], in dark clothing and speaks English well” was declared missing, having stepped off a bus in Eldgja, south Iceland, and not returned. In fact she had changed clothes before reboarding. In a twist worthy of the surrealist film director Louis Buñuel, she had taken part in the search herself, not realising she was the one people were looking for. The following day she realised that she was the “missing person”, and reported the matter to the police. *Reykjavik Grapevine (Iceland)*, 27 Aug 2012.



## SIDELINES...

### DESPERATE MEASURE

An Indian man was arrested after allegedly being caught burying his six-week-old daughter alive in the belief that it would protect his other children from illness. A local guru had told him to do this after the family had lost another child to illness. The baby was in hospital recovering from dehydration and malnutrition. (*Queensland Sunday Mail*, 13 May 2012).

### FOOLS' GOLD RUSH

Pakistanis were paying up to 2,500 rupees for one rupee coins after rumours swept the country that they had been made with gold instead of the usual tiny percentage of copper. The State Bank was forced to issue a denial to prevent people losing their savings on a coin made principally from aluminium and worth less than a penny. (*D. Telegraph*, 13 June 2012).

### HIGHWAY STEW

A meat truck hit another truck carrying onions on a freeway near Daytona Beach, Florida. Police spent hours in the heat clearing the mess with shovels. (*Sun*, 15 June 2012).

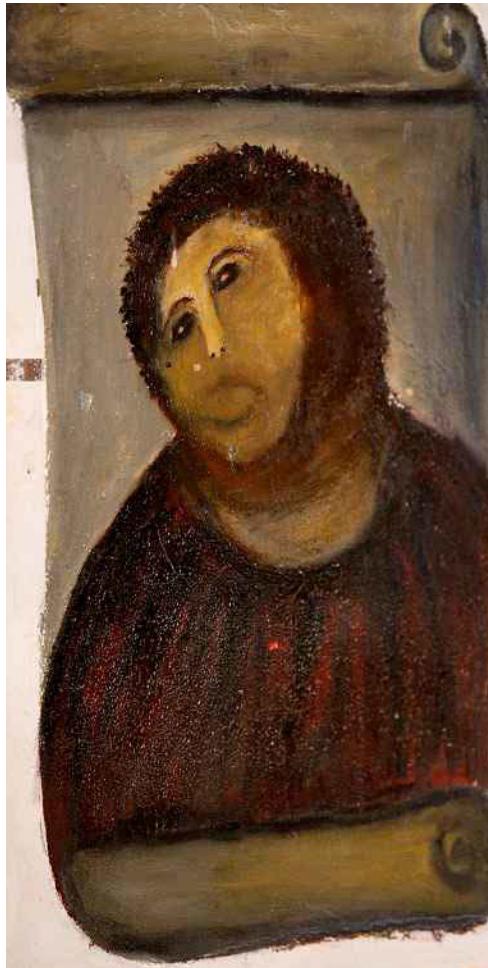
### DEADLY DANCING

Four women and two men were sentenced to death in northern Pakistan for singing and dancing at a wedding, after mobile phone video emerged of the six enjoying themselves in a remote village. Local clerics ordered the punishment under strict tribal customs that separate men and women at weddings. (*Queensland Courier-Mail*, 29 May 2012).

### INTREPID SAILOR

Matt Gill survived three weeks adrift in the Atlantic on a diet of pasta cooked in an oven he made from a glass jar, a shoelace and wire. He lost the mast and one of the rudders on his 40ft (12m) catamaran *Orinoko Flo* as he sailed solo from America to Falmouth in Cornwall. He was spotted by an RAF helicopter and towed to the Scilly Isles by lifeboat. (*Sun*, 15 June 2012).

## FRESCO FIASCO



ABOVE: The fresco photographed in July 2012 and following its 'restoration' by 81-year-old Cecilia Giménez.

For more than 120 years, *Ecce Homo*, a depiction of Christ crowned with thorns painted by Elías García Martínez, a local artist, has graced the wall of the Santuario de Misericordia Church in the village of Borja, near Zaragoza in north-eastern Spain. Over the past 18 months, its surface had deteriorated due to moisture in the church, causing parts of the fresco to flake off, so Cecilia Giménez, 81, a local woman, upset at the worsening state of an image she loved to gaze upon, decided to do some repainting. The result has been described as "the worst restoration job in history". One journalist said "It more closely resembles a bloated hedgehog than the image of Jesus before Pilate"; another said it "looks like

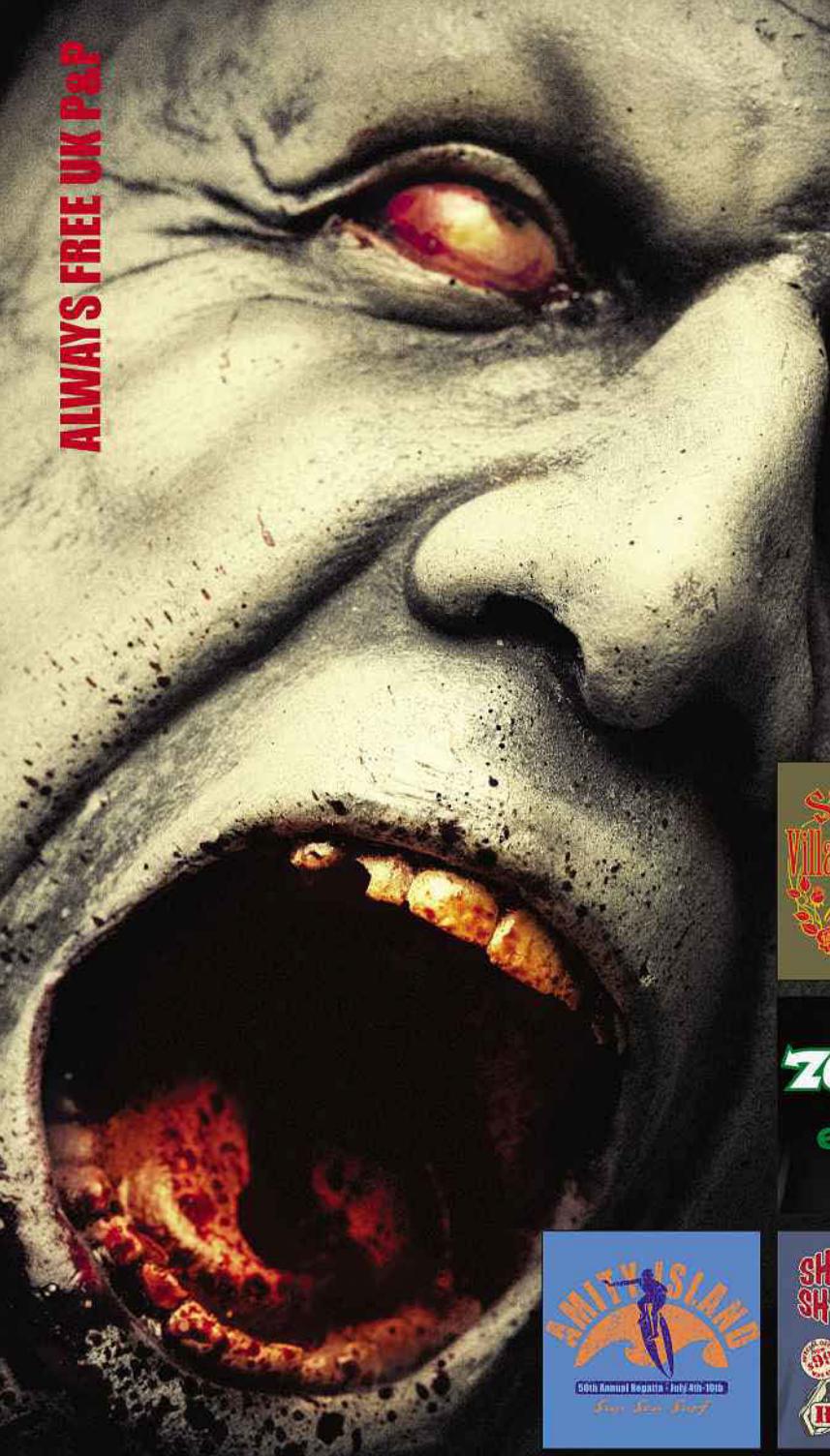
a movie werewolf". Twitter users have been calling it "Ecce Mono" (Behold the Monkey).

The 'restoration' was only discovered when the artist's granddaughter made a donation towards the fresco's upkeep and an expert was sent out to examine it. Ms Giménez denied she had undertaken the work without permission. "The priest knew about it," she said. "I did not do it secretly, anyone who entered the church could see me painting. With nothing but good intentions I did what I believed was the right thing. Besides, I hadn't finished it."

Following the publicity, the painting became a tourist attraction; the church began charging a four-euro entrance fee and made 2,000 euros in the first four days. Ms Giménez then demanded a cut,

to pass on to muscular atrophy charities. Thousands of locals signed a petition to leave the 'restored' painting as it is. It now has a Tumblr page where people Photoshop the image in many different places, including famous paintings such as Leonardo's 'The Last Supper'. It also has an on-line fan club called Beast-Jesus Restoration Society and it tweets under the handle @FrescoJesus. The chances of reversing the damage were thought to be slim. "If we can't fix it, we will probably cover it over with a photograph of the original," said Juan María Ojeda, a local councillor for culture. Not if the Beast-Jesus Restoration Society has anything to do with it. (*D. Telegraph*, 23+24 Aug, 21 Sept; *Guardian*, 23+25 Aug; *Daily Buzz*, 28 Aug 2012).

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## DOCTOR NEAR-DEATH?

DID A NEAR-DEATH EXPERT 'EXPERIMENT' ON HIS OWN DAUGHTER?  
BOB RICKARD OUTLINES A STRANGE US LEGAL CASE

**A**s far as we can tell, this chilling story – which caught our eye because of the mention of near-death research – was first broken by the *Huffington Post* and *Delaware Online*, both Internet news aggregators, on 8 August 2012. Their headlines were striking enough: Melvin Morse, a Delaware paediatrician, and his wife Pauline, were accused of torturing his 11-year-old daughter by 'waterboarding' her.

By the following day, many newsprint and TV news sources had seized upon the observation – made by our sceptical friend Benjamin Radford, among others – that Morse was an eminent researcher into Near-Death Experiences (NDEs). The headline for Radford's blog on the *Discovery News* blogsite – 'Near-Death Experience expert arrested for torture' – was fairly typical of how the story was reported nationwide on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Many went on to ask: was Morse trying to induce a near-death experience in his daughter? Indeed, within a week that notion seemed fixed in most of the reporting, typified by the AP headline on the 14<sup>th</sup>: "Delaware doctor's waterboarding of daughter may be tied to near-death research".

The initial arrest dates back to 12 July, when the couple's neighbours in Georgetown, Delaware, told state police that Morse was seen "grabbing his 11-year-old daughter by the ankles and dragging her across the driveway into the house, where he then spanked her". On 6 August, the daughter and her five-year-old sister were given shelter in the Child Advocacy Center. There, or possibly when interviewed by detectives and social workers a week later (it is not clear), she made a number of serious allegations about the way her father disciplined her. Morse and his wife were both arrested on the 7<sup>th</sup> and charged with "reckless endangerment, conspiracy and endangering



ABOVE: Delaware Police Department photos of Melvin Morse and his wife Pauline.

### She claimed her father had subjected her to near-suffocation

the welfare of a child". Morse could not meet the bail and was sent to the Sussex Correctional Institution. Pauline Morse was released and returned home.

Most of the details of the girl's statements were broadcast by AP and other news services when they obtained a copy of the affidavit used for the couple's arrest on the 7<sup>th</sup>. They were promptly picked up by national news outlets and a number of major TV stations that serve the adjacent regions of Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The Delaware medical authorities promptly revoked Morse's medical license.

According to that police record (cited in many of our sources), the girl claimed that her father had subjected her to several forms of near-suffocation "four times" between May 2009 and May 2011, particularly "by what he called 'waterboarding' – holding her face under the kitchen or bathroom taps as the running water ran over her face, making breathing difficult."

The court document continued: "The daughter told police she

'could never understand what she did to be punished' and felt scared. Once, she said, her father told her he 'was going to wrap her in a blanket and do it so that she could not move.' In another instance, she said Melvin Morse told her that 'she could go five minutes without brain damage'. Her father would sometimes look away while he did it and [she] would become afraid that he would lose track of time and she would die."

"After her father did these things, the girl said she would 'go outside and cry'. Morse would come outside and then 'hold her nose and mouth with his hand,'" the police record said. "He would not let go until she lost feeling and collapsed to the ground." When the girl's younger sister was also interviewed, she said she saw this happen to her sister, but that "it has never been done to her because she is too young for it." The girl also alleged that her mother Pauline stood by when she was 'waterboarded' and did nothing to stop it.

A search of Morse's computers revealed his interest in NDE research. The police affidavit claimed that he brought the girl "to a possible near-death state from the simulation of drowning". Speaking before the trial has begun, Joe Hurley, Morse's attorney, said the suggestion that Morse was experimenting on his daughter is "the sheerest of speculation".

Morse told AP that the claims made by his daughter, who had 'opposition issues', were 'absurd'. Hurley reminded reporters that she had made a false abuse claim against a step-sibling once before, and that these new claims remain 'allegations' until they can be substantiated in court.

After completing his medical degree in 1980, Melvin Morse specialised in paediatrics and neuro-oncology. Until 2007, he served on the medical faculty at the University of Washington. His interest in NDEs in children began in 1982, while working in a National Cancer Institute clinic in Pocatello, Idaho. He was called to revive a young girl who nearly drowned in a swimming pool. According to an account on Near-Death.com, she had had no heartbeat for 19 minutes, yet completely recovered. "She recounted many details of her own resuscitation, and then said that she was taken down a brick-lined tunnel to a heavenly place. When Dr Morse showed his obvious scepticism, she patted him shyly on the hand and said: 'Don't worry, Dr Morse, heaven is fun!'"

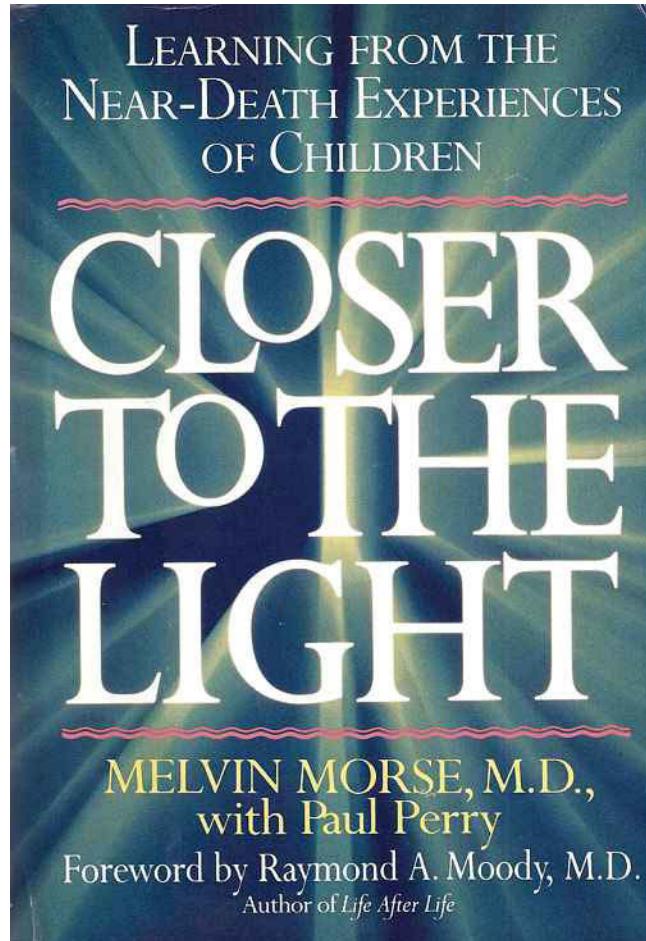
In the late 1980s, when he worked at the Seattle Children's Hospital – where *Seattle Magazine* listed him among the city's best doctors – he heard other children describe to him images of light, heaven and tunnels. Morse and several colleagues carried out a study of 26 children who nearly died, comparing their experiences with 131 children who were ill; all of them in an intensive care unit, mechanically ventilated, and treated with drugs such as morphine, valium and anaesthetic agents. Many of the latter group suffered a lack of oxygen to the brain, but nevertheless were not near-death. The study found that 23 of the 26 children who nearly died had NDEs, whereas none in the other group had. Morse's initial theory – that the NDEs might be due to drugs, or to a lack of oxygen to the

brain, proved untenable. He later wrote: "These children made it clear that consciousness persists despite having dying, dysfunctional brains," suggesting to him that "brains are linked to a non-local consciousness and a timeless, spaceless reality."

The publication of this unique research in the best-selling study *Closer to the Light: Learning from the Near Death Experiences of Children* (1991), was followed by two more co-authored books: *Transformed by the Light: the Powerful Effect of Near-death Experiences on People's Lives* (1993) and *Parting Visions: Pre-Death Visions and Spiritual Experiences* (1994). His name was up there with the likes of Raymond A Moody and Kenneth Ring. He was lauded in *Rolling Stone* (2004) and was a guest on many talk shows, including *Oprah* (1992) and *Larry King Live* (2010). Professionally, Morse was a Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics, a member of the National Institute for Discovery Science, and head of the Institute for the Scientific Study of Consciousness.

Just before Morse's July arrest, Phyllis Atwater, another veteran writer and researcher into NDEs, said she saw him at a conference in Montreal. "He gave one of the best keynote addresses he has ever given in his life," she told AP. However, she added, when she went to hug him, "I sensed a lot of worry and stress". Sadly, Morse's story gets murkier as more is revealed about his troubled past that goes beyond simply a parent disciplining his children. According to AP, court records show that Morse was "tormented by personal and financial problems and, according to court records, wrestled with depression, substance abuse and even suicidal thoughts".

Things started to go wrong for Morse in 1998, when he contracted Hepatitis C while treating children. In 2007 he retired from full-time medical practice and moved to Delaware, where the strain on his health resulted in him being declared 'disabled'. As AP put it: "Where Morse once earned a six-digit



ABOVE: One of Dr Morse's books concerning children and NDEs.

income, he has struggled financially for years and owes tens of thousands of dollars in back taxes." In the background was "a contentious divorce and custody battle with his first wife that stretched on for nearly a decade". His ex-wife, Allison Morse, told AP that her ex-husband "is a pathological liar and he makes stuff up about people including his own children". At the same time, she said he was a good dad and never abused their three adopted children during their marriage of almost two decades. Nor did she believe he was experimenting on his daughter.

In 2006, said AP, Morse was the subject of an inquiry by the Medical Quality Assurance Commission in Washington, and underwent three months of psychiatric treatment. In his affidavits to Washington

courts, Morse declared that he had made "a suicide gesture" and was treated in 2001 for "drug overdose, alcoholism, and depression," which he blamed on medications prescribed for the stress from his marital problems.

Morse told AP (in a telephone interview on 13 August) that the charges against him are an 'overreaction' from authorities who were criticised following one of the worst scandals of child sex abuse involving a paediatrician. This was a reference to his Delaware colleague Dr Earl Bradley, who in 2011 was given 14 life sentences for abusing 103 of his young patients over more than a decade, in Lewes, Delaware. Morse claims he was "the first doctor to blow the whistle on" Bradley as early as 2007. An inquiry was set up to learn how Bradley was allowed to continue practising medicine

up to his arrest in 2009, despite suspicions that he was molesting his patients. Hurley suggested that the lurid allegations against Morse might be 'an attention-getter' by authorities already embarrassed by acting too slowly in the Bradley case. He said: "I have no doubt but that the Bradley phenomenon has its fingerprints all over the sensationalisation of this situation."

On 16 August, a clean-shaven Dr Morse and his wife Pauline attended a hearing in the Sussex County Courthouse. In the short time since his arrest, matters took a turn for the worse as a 'disturbing' greeting card Morse sent to a step-daughter (one of Pauline's children) was publicly circulated. The card, said to be couched in inappropriate language, was sent in 2007, when the girl – named Ashley Holden by the downloadable publication *The Daily* – was around 15 years old and in a treatment programme. This is obvious grist to the prosecution, as Holden claimed Morse bullied her for years and "got joy out of hurting kids". However, she ended her statement to *The Daily* by stating that he never sexually abused her.

In this acrimonious case there is no shortage of mud to sling and we seem a long way from learning the truth of the near-death 'torture' allegation. It seems a strange allegation, because any testimony gained through such a dubious process would never have any academic or clinical authenticity. In the meantime, the files on Melvin and Pauline Morse have now been referred to the Supreme Court. *Huffington Post*, 8 Aug; *Delaware Online*, 8+16+17 Aug; *Discovery News*, 9 Aug; *D.Mail*, 9+14 Aug; *ABC News*, 9 Aug; *Time*, 10 Aug; *Washington Post*, 14 Aug; *Fox News*, 15 Aug; [AP] 10+14+15+16 Aug; *CBS News (online)* 9+15+16 Aug; *Daily Times (MD)*, *TheDaily.com*, 11 Aug; *Interview at Near-Death Experiences and the Afterlife (online)*: <http://near-death.com/experiences/experts06.html>, accessed 24 Aug 2012.

## THE LOCK OF LOVE

PUTTING PADLOCKS ON BRIDGES TO SYMBOLISE ETERNAL DEVOTION HAS SPREAD AROUND THE WORLD. AWWWW...



ABOVE: Love padlocks on the Pont des Arts in Paris (above and below) earlier this year.

In late August 2012, a *Daily Telegraph* correspondent noticed that the horizontal wires on the Millennium Bridge over the Thames near St Paul's were adorned (if that is the right word) with dozens of padlocks, many inscribed with messages and names. It turned out that the City of London Corporation has been removing the locks from the bridge every month, so it's hard to say when the habit spread to Britain. In September 2010, they were reported to festoon London's Tower Bridge as well as a fence in a Glasgow park. Other *Telegraph* correspondents wrote to say they had witnessed padlocks on the small canal bridge near the "spilled blood" cathedral in St Petersburg; on railings by the sea in Murmansk, north-western Russia; on Yellow Mountain in China's Anhui province; on the Hohenzollern Bridge in Cologne, Germany; and round the observation platform on the N Seoul Tower, the most prominent landmark in the centre of South Korea's capital. Other reports mention Lithuania, Riga in Latvia, Madrid, Tokyo, and the

### “They haven’t understood a thing about love”



Great Wall of China.

*Fortean Times* took notice of the phenomenon in 2007. For some time, lovers had been hanging padlocks and chains on a lamp-post on the Ponte Milvio, Rome's oldest bridge, and tossing the key into the Tiber to show eternal devotion. It was suggested that the habit resulted from a 2006 romantic novel – *Ho voglio di te* ("I Want You") by Federico Moccia – in which lovers fasten a chain of eternal love to a Ponte Milvio lamp-post. Another source refers to Moccia's 1992 novel, *Tre metri sopra il cielo* ("Three Meters above the Sky") as an inspiration – but short of reading this work, FT cannot say whether locks or chains feature. In September 2012, all the padlocks on the bridge were removed with bolt cutters. Officials designated a spot in a piazza nearby where locks could be left in future. The rite had also been enacted in Florence for several years, with padlocks on railings round the statue of Benvenuto Cellini by the Ponte Vecchio, and along the bridge itself. [FT239:25] One source maintains that the

Florentine padlock tradition began in the 1960s, when Italian soldiers stuck their wardrobe padlocks on the Ponte Vecchio – but how this ties in with love trysts is not explained.

In April 2009, thousands of lovers' padlocks were removed from the railings round a church opposite the Trevi Fountain in Rome. That same month, officials in the town of Mihamra, central Japan, were concerned that the security fence around the base of the Nomasaki lighthouse were going to buckle under the weight of an 'uncountable' number of padlocks put there by loving couples. The town had already replaced one fence that collapsed under the weight of padlocks with a sturdier version. A heart-shaped monument had been built close to the lighthouse with the purpose of encouraging couples to attach their padlocks there instead, but to no avail. The padlock habit reportedly began in the town a decade earlier.

By 2010, two footbridges across the Seine in Paris, including the elegant, seven-arched Pont des Arts by the Louvre, had become popular targets for lovers' metallic vows. Looked at from a distance, the mesh-sided footbridge appeared to have been attacked by a swarm of metal locusts. Hundreds of locks, from cheap suitcase fasteners to elaborate double-bolted brass contraptions, had been inscribed with names or initials and their keys tossed romantically into the Seine. City officials promised not to remove the padlocks until an alternative had been devised, such as the 'metal trees' for love locks erected in 2009 beside the Luzhkov Bridge in Moscow.

In June 2010, a wire mesh fence in Ballast Point Park next to Sydney harbour in Australia had become covered in love padlocks. The year before, there was a similar craze near Wollongong, where more than a

# 2012 WATCH

dozen locks were attached to the Sea Cliff Bridge.

By August 2011, padlocks were appearing on Venice's historic Rialto bridge, threatening damage to the stonework and requiring policemen with bolt-cutters to remove them. "We have found 50 of them on metal stanchions but have yet to nab anyone in the act," said Stefania Battaglia, head of Venice's office for urban quality. The newspaper *La Repubblica* called for 3,000-euro fines and up to a year in jail for anyone caught attaching locks to the Rialto. Ms Battaglia said that young couples had first shown a preference for the wooden Ponte del Accademia, where up to 300 locks were fixed, despite a general lock-removal the previous February.

"The fools! They haven't understood a thing about love, have they?" exclaimed a 23-year-old waiter at Panis, a café on the Left Bank in Paris. At the heart of love à la française lies the idea of freedom. To love truly is to want the other free, and this includes the freedom to walk away. Love is not about possession or property. Love is not capitalist, but revolutionary. If anything, true love shows you the way to selflessness. The idea that you can lock two people's love once and for all, and toss away the key, is a puerile fantasy. Actually, more worldly-wise Parisian newlyweds now use combination padlocks: a safe and reversible way to declare eternal love.

Sometimes padlocks have been used to symbolise something other than love trysts. In 1989, for instance, several thousand padlocks were attached to iron railings near Széchenyi Square in the Hungarian city of Pécs to celebrate the end of Soviet rule. Maybe the whole thing began there... *D. Telegraph*, 17 April 2009; 29+30+31 Aug, 1+3 Sept 2012; [UPI] 20 April 2009; *Independent*, 5 May 2010; *Guardian*, 24 Aug 2011; *MX News (Sydney)*, 27 Feb; *Int. Herald Tribune*, 20 Aug; *Guardian*, 12 Sept 2012. For the parallel but distinct phenomenon of shoes hanging from wires and trees, see FT130:24, 211:20, 274:20.

PETER BROOKESMITH TUNES IN TO CORRIE'S CHIRPY DOOMSDAY PROPHET

## COCK A HOOP-LA

At last we are able to bring you tidings of great joy for the coming Yuletide. William Roache MBE, alias Ken Barlow of Coronation Street, alias Bill "Cock" Roache of "I bedded a thousand women" fame, Deep Purple fan – but not, he insists, a Druid, a spiritualist or boring – has given us all cause for cheer as this December's apocalypse draws nearer. In such trying times this makes an invigorating change from the miserablist brayings issuing from the throats of a thousand New-Age Eeyores.

Roache is one of those rare jolly souls who sees wonderful things about to descend on us come December. In an interview published in early September in the 'spiritual paranormal & metaphysical' magazine *Silent Voices* he pinpointed 12 – not 21 – December as the Great Turning Point, a distinctly minority view. The world won't end then, but will "change dramatically" as it moves into that ancient cliché, a "higher vibration". "This will be the Golden Age, when a majority will know they are love and they are spiritual beings," averred Roache confidently. "The Earth will continue to cleanse itself while material and negative things will collapse and cease to be."

As TV sets (and Mack trucks and toilet rolls and possibly even my woodpile) dematerialise, that will presumably mean the end of Roache's record-breaking 52-year stint on Corrie, a thought that seems to have escaped him. Still, no great harm done. Personally, I stopped watching when the show started going out in colour – I mean, how implausible. Undaunted by the prospect of his sudden superannuation, Roache confided: "The energy and light of the Creator is love. Love is the life force, it is everything, it is the law of attraction. I have always known that there are beings around me, loving and guiding, and never more so than now. Understand we are all pure love, made in love, living in love. It is urgent to get this over. Time is running out." Indeed.

In another interview on local Welsh radio in December 2011, Roache explained (to his own satisfaction) why this wondrous new dispensation will require a little preparatory scouring: "Now, unfortunately, there are some cleansings that have to take place, where negative energy has to be discharged, and these will be in the form of earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and tsunamis." This is at least a trifle less ghastly, and even a bit more logical, than some of the futures predicted by other ever-loving New Agers reviewed in this column. But one does wonder what all those ladies in Roache's past might say about his dictum that "We are love, love solves everything, love is everything."

Roache also revealed his belief that "The Earth is a living being with consciousness and it has an understanding. And just like we can

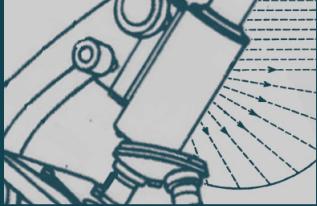


become enlightened... the Earth can also do the same and this is what is happening. We'll move into the golden age, which will be a wonderful age where we'll all love, we'll communicate telepathically. We'll all be aware of our spiritual selves, and it will be a beautiful place to be."

Or will it? Telepathy for the masses, already. No more surprises for the little ones at Christmas, then, as they all read Santa's mind and get chopsy about not getting quite the new gimcrack electronic gizmo they were so deludedly lustng after. The rest of us will just go stark staring mad as our brains go bust under the onslaught of every living genius's Great Thoughts (some doubtless articulated in mental ink of many colours) along with the world and his cat's urgent ruminations on laundry lists, grotesque psychopathic proclivities, gearbox modifications, china dogs, pizza recipes, gas leaks, fish conservation, improvements to suicide-bomber belts, Sibelius's alcoholism and all manner of other hates, desires, pleasures, boredoms, obsessions, enchantments, despairs and delights. You do wish that even the chirpier 2012 prophets like William Roache would just think things through for once before wittering on.

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# THE SECRET LIFE OF PLANTS

Do plants have a nervous system? Can they feel pain? These are questions that have exercised everyone from Charles Darwin to L Ron Hubbard, says **DAVID HAMBLING**

**A**nimated vegetables like Triffids are confined to science fiction, and we have little trouble distinguishing animals from plants. However, biologists have long known that plants do sense and react in ways that resemble animals. But how much do the researchers really know, and can they answer the perennial question of "do plants feel pain"?

This was a topic which interested Charles Darwin. His 1880 book *The Power of Movement in Plants*,<sup>1</sup> one of his last works, attempted to show how plant behaviour adapted to any environment. Like others, he noted how plants were sensitive to light, gravity and touch. He was particularly interested in the radicle, the growing tip of a seedling, and suggested that plants had a nervous system:

"It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the tip of the radicle thus endowed, and having the power of directing the movements of the adjoining parts, acts like the brain of one of the lower animals; the brain being seated within the anterior end of the body, receiving impressions from the sense-organs, and directing the several movements."

Further work in this area was carried out by the celebrated Indian botanist and physicist Jagadish Chandra Bose, who developed a device called a Crescograph to record the movement of the growing tip of a plant at high magnification. In 1907 he published a paper on the electrophysiology of plants, and showed that they produced an electrical potential in response to contact or damage.<sup>2</sup> The obvious conclusion was that they possessed the same sort of nervous system as animals.

The flagship for plant feelings is the 'sensitive plant', *Mimosa pudica*, a tropical plant which reacts to being touched by folding up its leaves. This seems to be a defence against heavy rainstorms, and it shows that plants are capable of animal-like reactions to their surroundings. The Venus flytrap, which snaps shut when trigger hairs are touched, is a more spe-



cialised example, and both have been studied intensively.

However, from the 1960s scientific work on plant feelings was overshadowed in the media by less rigorous work with more immediate appeal. If Bose could attach instruments to plants, so could others. Cleve Backster, an ex-CIA operative and "Chairman of the Research and Instrument Committee of the Academy for Scientific Interrogation", was inspired by Bose's work to hook up a polygraph lie-detector to plant leaves. Backster claimed that not only did plants respond to damage, but they also responded to the threat of damage, and even other plants or animals being damaged nearby.

Not one to be left out, L Ron Hubbard created headlines about 'screaming tomatoes' in 1968. He attached an E-meter, the Scientologists' favourite electronic device for measuring electrical resistance, to plant leaves. The media were intrigued. While much of the coverage was frivolous, with interviewers like Alan Whicker asking Hubbard if rose pruning should be allowed, he garnered plenty of publicity for his research and was featured in *Life* magazine.<sup>3</sup>

*The Secret Life of Plants* by

## L Ron Hubbard made headlines by attaching E-meters to tomato plants

Peter Tomkins and Christopher Bird, which covered various plant phenomena, was a bestseller in 1973; Stevie Wonder released his soundtrack to the subsequent documentary as an album. Lyall Watson's *Supernature*, also a bestseller in 1973, helped popularise the same findings.

The cumulative effect was to lodge screaming plants firmly in the public consciousness. The 'amazing but true' phenomena are regularly wheeled out by nature-lovers as a sign of the unity of all living things, and even more regularly used to taunt vegetarians that cabbages have feelings too.

However, the world of science was moving away from the idea of plant pain well before Backster. Darwin's suggestion that the radicle acted like a brain was rejected by plant physiologists at the time, and *The Power of Movement in*

*Plants* did not attract a following. Scientists from Cornell University replicated Backster's experimental set-up in 1975, but failed to find any evidence for the 'primary perception' he had claimed.<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime, we have learned much more about how plant senses work. Plants do not have anything which resembles a central nervous system, which rules out feeling in the normal sense. But they do have bundle sheath cells running along their veins, and these carry the electrical potential measured by Bose. The potential drives the *Mimosa pudica*'s reaction and many others. Many plants have phototrophins, chemicals sensitive to blue light, which can trigger a reaction to lengthen one side of a stem – and so flowers turn to face the Sun. A different mechanism reacts to red light and allows plants to sense day and night.

Some of the mechanisms involved turn out to be highly sophisticated, and get translated into headlines like the BBC's "Plants Can Think And Remember"<sup>5</sup> or the *Daily Mail*'s "Plants Can Talk, say scientists".<sup>6</sup> That's the sound of analogies being overstretched. My computer is not really 'thinking' while the hourglass symbol is displayed, doesn't play chess 'intelligently' and doesn't 'remember' the files stored on it.

There are still plenty of mysteries around how plants respond and communicate. They signal to each other by emitting ethylene gas and hormones, and there are indications that roots emit and respond to sounds. They can 'smell' airborne chemicals and 'taste' with their roots, sensing and reacting to other plants nearby. Plants really do have many of the capabilities you would associate with animals, but they work by very different means.

They are life, you might say, but not life as we know it.

## NOTES

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# GHOWWATCH

ALAN MURDIE looks at the modern myths behind a London vampire and an Essex witch

JOHN DOWNING / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES



## THE HIGHGATE VAMPIRE LIVES!

In last month's column I touched upon impaled witch skeletons found at St Osyth and in passing mentioned a vampiric entity reported by Christiana Foyle at Beeleigh Abbey, Essex, in 1974. Stories of vampires in Britain are rare, but this month I am once again drawn to reports from sites associated with such emotive supernatural entities as fall into the dictionary definition of a vampire as "a ghost that leaves its grave at night to attack the living."

A few years back it was widely predicted by members of the Folklore Society that the tale of the vampire of Highgate Cemetery would run and run. Jacqueline Simpson and the late Jennifer Westwood wrote in *The Lore of the Land* (2006) that lurid tales from the 1960s and early 1970s were destined to become a permanent part of London folklore, and in *The Lore of London* (2008) the disapproving Stephen Roud stated: "Since the 1970s, there has been continuous interest in Highgate from the vampire-hunting brigade, and now that the Internet has given the notion perpetual life, there is little hope of it ever being forgotten." And: "There is no stopping the story of the Highgate Vampire, which now features on innumerable websites as one of the 'proven' vampire infestations of the modern age". This is probably true, as thanks to the worldwide web, even the vaguest hint of a 'genuine' vampire tradition ensures that hordes of living curiosity seekers and tourists will descend in a way unknown when such stories were confined to scholarly books.

Earlier this year, I spoke to Scottish supernatural expert Geoff Holder, who told me his own serious enquiries into the Victorian tale of Croglan Grange in Cumbria had been met with a disproportionately hostile response from locals annoyed by sightseers lured there by

sensational web-based re-tellings of this 19th century story – and this despite the whole tale being discredited by an analysis in *Fortean Times* back in 1993 (FT68:39-41). Currently, I know of only one classic location so far spared an influx of Internet-inspired vampire hunters, but, like the 'giant rat of Sumatra', that is a story for which the world is not yet ready (to quote Sherlock Holmes in the story of the Sussex Vampire).

Well, the inevitable has happened with Highgate. On 28 June 2012, the *Haringey Independent* reported that two ghost hunters and a medium from the group North London Paranormal Investigators (NLPI) were scared by a dark figure at the cemetery. Mickey Gocool, 46, and Louise Roche, 23, were giving their newly recruited medium Gemma Louise Pugh a tour when the apparition appeared fleetingly before them. Gocool said his team at first thought the ghost could have been a vampire rumoured to frequent Highgate Cemetery, but he now believes it is more likely to be the spirit of an undertaker because it was smartly dressed in a suit.

Now an undertaker seen at Highgate Cemetery is perhaps not surprising since it is still a functioning burial ground, but NLPI are convinced it was an apparition as it vanished after a split second. Gocool stated: "It really was not a sinister presence. He was a normal, average Joe Public, but because he was so tall he actually looked like a vampire." But though tall, gaunt and pale, the form was not menacing. To Gocool the apparition was "like the sort of guy that you take home to meet your family." Gocool may, of course, have an extremely tolerant family.

NLPI now plan to investigate the sighting and see if they can find out anything about its background in or around Highgate.

Their report was endorsed the following

LEFT: Highgate Cemetery, home to a long-running vampire saga. FACING PAGE: Betty Potter's Dip, near Boxley, where some believe a suicidal witch will rise from the dead on 21 October 2012.

week by none other than Highgate veteran David Farrant of the British Psychic and Occult Society, a notorious figure from the 'Highgate Vampire' heyday. He appeared in the paper on 3 July 2012 to link the sighting with his own entity experience in the cemetery in the 1960s that helped trigger the stories of a vampire haunting, which pre-Internet was encouraged along by rather uncritical re-tellings in the 1970s. However, Farrant told the paper that although the media had widely branded the figure as a vampire, he has never said this is the case – instead it simply looked like one because it had been so tall and enrobed in dark clothing.

Featuring alongside his opinions were those of his wife Della Farrant, another member of the British Psychic and Occult Society making further claims concerning the apparition reported by the NLPI. She stated the Society has details from another witness who watched a figure float across Swain's Lane from the east side to the west side of the cemetery in August 2005. She said the witness, who wished to remain anonymous, described the male figure as being dressed in a three-quarter-length coat and a top hat. This was one of the areas that featured in the rather dubious ghost reports in the 1970s.

According to the latest claims, in 2005 the figure supposedly even whispered "Good evening to you sir" to the terrified witness, despite being at least 8ft (2.4m) away. This detail in itself may cast doubt on the story in not only adding a highly folkloric touch but also running distinctly contrary to the modern behaviour patterns of almost all reported apparitions in the Western world. Modern ghosts largely refrain from speaking and rarely exhibit signs of conscious awareness or acknowledge the presence of observers. Nonetheless, Mrs Farrant maintains that this figure and the apparition reported by the NLPI are identical and that it is not confined to the cemetery but is often seen in Highgate pubs. One might add it could well be that many of these sightings were stimulated by – or even conceived in – Highgate taverns, along with the tale of the phantom chicken of Pond Square at the top of Swains Lane on Highgate Hill.

The press did not on this occasion revisit the history of the prosecution and trial of David Farrant at the Old Bailey in July 1974 arising from his activities in the cemetery, but he has detailed these in an autobiography he brought out earlier this year. The sensational trial ended with Farrant being sentenced to four years and eight months in jail.

At the 1996 FT UnConvention, Farrant maintained that he had been a victim of a miscarriage of justice, that the police had deliberately framed him after he had previously evaded conviction for nocturnal activities in the cem-

etary on ingenious legal technicalities, and had further aggravated officers by serving them with voodoo dolls. Regarding Farrant's claims of being framed, I admit to entertaining a slight scintilla of unease regarding the conduct of the prosecution, based upon the allegations for which he was originally arrested. These were offences relating to desecrating graves; possession of a .38 handgun and ammunition contrary to the Firearms Act 1968; and theft of pillowcases and linen from Barnet Hospital.

It's the inclusion of the pillowcases and linen that makes me wonder. One instinctively feels that with grave-robbing and firearms offences, the police had more than enough to ensure a lengthy jail term upon conviction, without dragging in allegations concerning hospital pillowcases into an already sensational case. In the circumstances, arrest in connection with missing NHS laundry does seem rather like a zealous attempt at overloading any indictment, and gives the impression that someone in authority had decided to stop Farrant's activities amid crusades against the scourge of modern vampirism, in the same way as the Witchcraft Act 1735 was brought out to suppress medium Helen Duncan in 1944. I cannot help but wonder what Bram Stoker, himself a barrister and author of a book on criminal procedure (admittedly in the Irish courts), would have made of this.

But still, it was half a lifetime ago, the era of police practices nostalgically revisited in the TV show *Life on Mars* and a different moral climate. Maybe in those days there was a greater urge to protect NHS property and alleged laundry thefts were up there alongside grave-robbing and gun crime as social evils to be ruthlessly suppressed. Also, in comparison to Farrant's lengthy imprisonment, the ghoulish teenage vandals who desecrated the Mackenzie tomb in Greyfriars Kirkyard, Edinburgh, in 2004 were treated with exceptional leniency, receiving only probation orders. But perhaps Farrant's prosecution was intended to have a deterrent effect, and Highgate Cemetery has been a lot calmer since; hopefully

there was also a corresponding decline in offences relating to NHS laundry.

I have remarked in a previous column that undertakers and morticians seem rarely to report ghosts, but this is of course no bar to them making personal post-mortem returns as apparitions (see for example the numerous accounts of phantom funerals). Sometimes they appear to be grinning and rather jolly, perhaps making up for undue forced solemnity in life. See, for example, scattered examples referred to by such diverse writers as John Keel in *Our Haunted Planet* (1971) and Joan Foreman in *Haunted East Anglia* (1974). It is perhaps inevitable that the ghostly figure should be on the tall side in tradition – see Elliot O'Donnell, *Dangerous Ghosts* (1954).

## BETTY POTTER'S DIP

Meanwhile, belief that dangerous supernatural beings may be on the loose leads us back to Essex with claims that the ghost of a witch who committed suicide is due to rise from her grave at midnight 21 October 2012 near the village of Boxted. A spot along the road is known as 'Betty Potter's Dip' named after Elizabeth Potter (no relation to Harry) who was reputedly a witch and was buried as a suicide in the 18th century. An alternative tradition states she was supposedly hanged for witchcraft by her enemies a century earlier, much to the anger of Matthew Hopkins who had wanted to try and hang her himself.

Robert Halliday, an historian and authority on roadside graves and burials in the UK, has conducted extensive research into the Betty Potter legend. He discounts the Hopkins story as a modern piece of myth-making (it first appears in print in 1968, a year after the film *Witchfinder General* was made) and instead links her with an historical individual who took her own life in 1771. Burial as a suicide led to the victim of *felo de se* ('self-murder') being interred at a crossroads, sometimes with a stake driven through the heart or body, a practice that persisted until outlawed by Parliament

in 1823. Bodies were impaled with a stake, supposedly to stop the dead from walking, although this has been doubted by Stephen Roud, who takes the view that the ritual was to re-enforce social disapproval of suicide. This seems like a modern rationalisation imposed upon an ancient tradition that became a common practice.

Personally, I reject this interpretation, finding it hard to believe that anybody sets about hammering a stake into a corpse solely as a means of declaring: "This is to demonstrate to the community at large that your behaviour is considered most inappropriate". With one exception in the 15th century, impalement as a punishment was not practised in Britain, being considered repugnant, nor was it applied to the bodies of other executed criminals, suicide being a criminal offence up until 1961. Rather, it seems based on the spiritual and emotional feelings attached to dead bodies across ancient Europe, which has still not disappeared completely.

However, in Betty Potter's case, the stake does not seem to have been adequate, as shown by contemporary beliefs collected in Boxted by Robert Halliday, revealing that she is now an anniversary ghost who is to be seen crossing the stretch of road on 21 October each year. Betty's ghost is also averred to be responsible for causing road accidents, though fortunately only as few as four in nearly a century are attributed to her malefic influence – roughly one every 25 years presuming any connection whatsoever. This seems unlikely to be in any way statistically significant, given accident rates on Essex roads, as Robert Halliday himself points out. However, he also told me that although he has visited many reputedly haunted sites and seldom felt anything untoward or scary, Betty Potter's Dip has a distinctly eerie feel to it, perhaps because of its low-lying location and the overhanging trees.

The belief that Betty returns on 21 October may be an echo of older traditions associated with All Soul's Day on 1 November when the dead were commemorated, prior to the change in the calendar in 1752, when 11 days were 'lost'. The story is now being promoted on the Internet by the 'Miskatonic University' website, inspired by devotees of HP Lovecraft's Call of Cthulu mythos, so at least Boxted will provide a rural alternative to Highgate for hunters of the undead in the run up to Hallowe'en...

## SOURCES

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ROBERT HALLIDAY

## DREAMS OF POWER

Starry-eyed inventors continue to reach for the skies but tend to remain disappointingly earthbound



ABOVE: Agha Waqar Ahmad and his water-powered car, as vouched for by AQ Khan. FACING PAGE: Steorn's full-page advertisement in *The Economist*.

### THE WATER CAR

Last July, a small-town engineer in Pakistan called Agha Waqar Ahmad claimed to have found a way to run a car on water. "By the grace of Allah, I have managed to make a formula that converts less voltage into more energy," he said. "This invention will solve our country's energy crisis and provide jobs to hundreds of thousands of people."

The quest to harness chemical energy from water by splitting it into oxygen and hydrogen is a scientific holy grail, offering the tantalising promise of a world free from dependence on oil. The scientific establishment predictably scoffed at this latest claim – apart from Abdul Qadeer Khan, the notorious father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme and erstwhile exporter of nuclear technology, who told a television journalist: "I have investigated the matter, and there is no fraud involved." Across Pakistan, the shimmering mirage of a 'water car' was received with enthusiasm. Government ministers praised Mr Ahmad, sometimes at cabinet meetings. The acting minister for religious affairs, Khursheed Shah, appeared on television with him and took a ride in his small Suzuki rental

### "This invention will solve our energy crisis and provide jobs"

car, which was hooked up to a contraption described as a 'water kit'. Talk show hosts suggested the engineer should get state financing and protection.

Mr Ahmad, 40, is an unlikely scientific prodigy. The father of five graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering in 1990 from a small technical college in Khairpur, Sindh province. For most of his career, he worked in a local police department, but is currently unemployed. He dismissed his critics, claiming to have run the Suzuki for 250 miles (400km) on 2 gallons (10 litres) of water. "I am not concerned with theory," he said. "I have given a practical demonstration that a vehicle can run on water. What more proof do these critics need?"

In a word, more. Water car jokes have circulated widely on Twitter, while an Internet comedy group, The Naked Tyrant, rolled

out a spoof video featuring a religious man who claimed to make his car run on 'pious deeds'. As a reader of one newspaper noted in a letter to the editor: "What is odd is that the only specimen so far on display is the one fitted in his own car."

On 11 August, Atta ur Rahman, a former Pakistani minister of Science and Technology, reported that Ahmad's vehicle was to be fully inspected by engineers at the National University of Science & Technology – but Ahmad never showed up. *International Herald Tribune*, 6 Aug; *thenews.com.pk*, 12 Aug 2012.

### RUNNING ON BRINE?

As hope springs eternal, claims for wonder fuels crop up every few years. Many years ago, *Fortean Times* correspondent CA Worth recalled a report that he read in the *Sunday Express* "between the wars". This asserted that, during World War I, an American tried to interest the British authorities in a substance that, when added to water, gave the same performance as petrol. The Admiralty was persuaded to test the claim: the man was driven to Portsmouth in a staff car, which stopped by the quay and had its tank drained. A bucket was slung

into the harbour and filled with seawater, to which was added the mysterious secret ingredient, and the mixture poured into the tank. The car started and was driven with results agreed to be better than those obtained by ordinary petrol. The American thought he had it made, but the Naval brass suspected that they had been conned, and the project was abandoned. Disappointed, he caught a ship for home and, a few days out, disappeared with no one able to decide if it was suicide or murder. [FT7:21-22, Nov 1974]. If anyone can run this intriguing yarn to ground in a newspaper library, FT would be delighted to hear from you.

### MIRACLE MACHINE DISAPPOINTS

Claims for free energy machines crop up every few years. In August 2006, for instance, a Dublin-based company called Steorn took out a full-page advertisement in the *Economist* to announce that it had discovered a source of "free, clean and constant energy", a perpetual motion machine no less. (When Lisa Simpson invented a perpetual motion machine, Homer was outraged, saying: "In this house we obey the laws of thermodynamics!") The Irish company claimed

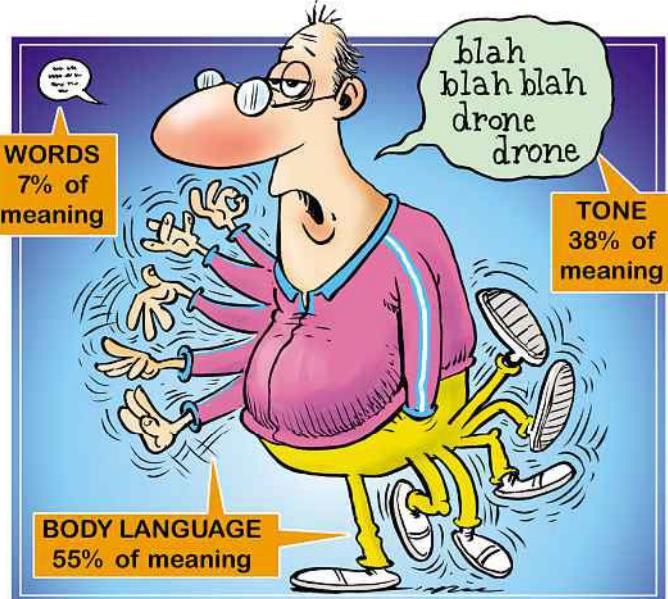
# Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

## 159. THE MEHRABIAN MYTH

### The myth

The actual words used only account for seven per cent of the communication of a spoken message – the tone of voice carries 38 per cent of the meaning, while 55 per cent comes from body language.



ILLUSTRATIONS: HUNT EMERSON

### The “truth”

It's hard to imagine anyone believing something so obviously untrue – but millions do, thanks to this column's old friend, the misinterpreted research paper. Albert Mehrabian, currently an emeritus professor of psychology in California, published two papers in 1967 that suggested the primacy of non-verbal communication – but only in a specific and limited context concerning feelings and attitudes. So, if you ask someone how their soup is, and they say “Lovely” in a strangulated tone, their face distorted into a grimace of disgust, their non-verbal signals will be more useful to you than their words. Or, word: in the research, only one word at a time was uttered. The “7%-38%-55% rule” therefore only applies if three conditions are met: 1) only a single word is spoken; 2) the word and the non-verbal communications contradict each other; 3) the only judgement the listener is making concerns a like and/or dislike of the speaker. From these meagre foundations, a whole industry of nonsense has built up, infesting such sectors as corporate training, public speaking coaching and “communications consultancy”.

### Sources

[www.trainingzone.co.uk/item/184720](http://www.trainingzone.co.uk/item/184720); [www.kaaj.com/psych/smorder.html](http://www.kaaj.com/psych/smorder.html); [www.speakingaboutpresenting.com/presentation-myths/mehrabian-nonverbal-communication-research](http://www.speakingaboutpresenting.com/presentation-myths/mehrabian-nonverbal-communication-research)

### Disclaimer

The Prof himself has made frequent attempts to correct the misinterpretations of his formula. However, as always, if you can add or subtract anything to or from the above, please contact *FT*'s letters page. You'll have to use words, though – we can't see your expression from here.

### Mythchaser

A reader requests your thoughts on this one: it's often claimed that a single page of a 21st century broadsheet newspaper contains more information than a typical rural Briton of the 18th century would have learned in a lifetime.

"All great truths begin as blasphemies"  
—George Bernard Shaw

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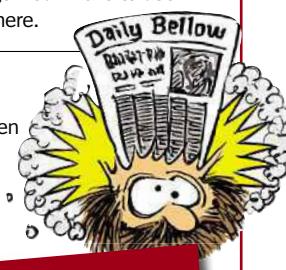
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## CULTS AND FERAL KIDS

An underground sect and feral children in Russia, and the sad tale of Indian dog-boy Chotu Kumar

### UNDERGROUND PROPHET

Faizrakhman Sattarov (right) had a vision from Allah: he would build an Islamic caliphate underground. Sattarov, from the oil-rich province of Tartarstan on the Volga, the biggest majority-Muslim region in Russia, declared himself a prophet in the mid-1960s, in contradiction to the principles of Islam, after interpreting sparks from a trolleybus cable as a divine light from Allah. In the Soviet era he worked for official Islamic authorities in the neighbouring region of Bashkortostan, but fell out with them when the KGB sent him to Muslim nations with propaganda about religious freedom in the officially atheist Soviet Union. "That's how I became Satan's servant, a traitor," he said in a 2008 interview with the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* daily. "When I understood that, I repented and started preaching."

In 1996, Sattarov acquired a 7,530 sq ft (700m<sup>2</sup>) plot of land for a madrassa (Islamic school) in the village of Torfyanoj, near Kazan, Tartarstan's provincial capital, about 500 miles (800km) east of Moscow. Here, his followers built a ramshackle three-storey brick building, topped by a minaret. About a decade ago, they decided to shun the outside world and began enlarging the basement. About 70 followers moved into an eight-level subterranean labyrinth of about 30 cramped and damp cells with no light, heat, or ventilation. The sect, dubbed Faizrakhmanists after their founder, doesn't recognise Russian state laws or the authority of mainstream Sunni Muslim leaders in Tatarstan.

Only a few sect members – who call themselves *muammin* (believers) – were allowed to leave the community to work as traders at a local market. Children were born. They too lived in the underground cells, until authorities raided the compound following attacks on Muslim clerics. On 19 July, Ildus Fayzov, the moderate Mufti of Tartarstan, was injured in a car



### About a decade ago they decided to shun the outside world

bomb and Valiulla Yakupov, his deputy, was shot dead at his home. Sattarov's compound was raided on 3 August in a routine check of conservative Islamic groups, even though there was no suggestion that his followers were connected to the attacks. The police found 38 adults – and 27 children, who rarely saw the light of day and had never left the compound, gone to school or been treated by a doctor. One girl of 17 was found to be pregnant. Some were placed in care, others in hospital; a number were suffering from anaemia and tuberculosis. Their parents were charged with child abuse and Sattarov (now aged 83) with "arbitrariness", an offence broadly defined as "unauthorised commission of actions contrary to the order presented by a law or any other normative legal act". It is punishable by up to five years in prison, but according to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Sattarov is bedridden and delirious.

The sect's house was built illegally and will be demolished. "They will come with bulldozers and guns, but they will have to

demolish this house over our dead bodies," said sect member Gumer Ganiyev on the *Vesti* television channel. The sect was said to have followers in several other cities in Tartarstan and other Volga river provinces. *BBC News*, 9 Aug; *D. Telegraph*, *Guardian*, *Irish Times*, 10 Aug 2012.

### FERAL NEWS

Dima Fabrin, a boy of seven who can only walk on all fours and can hardly speak, was taken into care after his mother Tatiana, 34, raised him "as a dog". She is said to have tied her son to a table leg and called him 'doggie' or 'dog who barks'. She often abandoned him at home in Tula, Russia, without food or water, according to prosecutors. Dima was sent to

a rehabilitation centre for children. Doctors said he had serious health problems. *Sun*, 8 Aug 2012.

● A five-year-old Russian girl was found living with cows in the Solikamsk district of the Ural Mountains after the authorities were alerted by a worried neighbour living close to the small farm run by the girl's alcoholic mother and stepfather. She was unable to speak and was only capable of communicating by mooing noises. Her only toys were cigarette butts. She didn't know how to eat properly, preferring to drink milk from a saucepan. "The little girl did not attend kindergarten and hardly went out, so when we rescued her she was basically wearing no clothes," said a police source. "She would spend entire days on the farm in the midst of cows, and when she bothered her parents they would simply lock her in the storeroom." After first being sent to a rehabilitation centre, she has now been placed with a foster family. *Sunday Times*, 29 July; *MX News (Sydney)*, 30 July 2012. For other recent feral children in Russia, see FT250:22, 252:17, 292:14.

● Chotu Kumar, six (below), has been filmed suckling from a stray dog to allay his hunger. "Our family is very poor, sometimes I get hungry," he said. "The dog doesn't bite me. I like her and she



likes me, she treats me like one of her puppies. I love to play with the dogs, they're my friends." Chotu lives with his mother Shanichari Devi, 37, his grandmother Amiya Devi, 60, and his two brothers Bola, 14, and Mahesh, three, in a adobe hut in Jharkhand, eastern India. After his father's death four years ago, the family dropped below the poverty line. Bola earns £20 a month working at a nearby hotel. His mother and grandmother collect firewood in the forest where they try to find food, but their normal diet consists of a few vegetables and bread.

Two years ago, Chotu began spending all his time with a pack of dogs. As he didn't go to school, he had no human friends. The family hadn't eaten any solid food or milk for days when, one morning, Shanichari saw Chotu drinking milk from a dog's teat. "I was shocked," she said. "I ran over and pulled him away. But ever since whenever he is hungry he has always slipped back. I have let him because I know how hungry he is. The dog has always been friendly with him and never attacks him. He often rides on her back, and then he jumps off and sucks on her teat along with her pups. The bitch licks him while he feeds just like she does with her own pups." The dog even sits outside the family's hut and barks for the boy to come out and play.

Villagers eventually reported Chotu to local officials and he was admitted to a school where he gets a free lunch. The authorities also gave the family a food card, allowing them to get food aid. However, the dog continues to visit Chotu and he has got used to sucking from her. "I suck her milk three times a day and it tastes sweet like sugar," he said. "Many people in the village don't like my friendship with the dogs, but I am happy. If she isn't near my home I go looking for her outside the village. She's always happy to see me and lets me have some milk." *mirror.co.uk, 6 July 2012.*



#### THE GORGAKH - A TOOTHLESS TERROR

In mid-August 2012, numerous websites and YouTube videos carried a photo (above) of the corpse of a seemingly very large, scaly-backed creature referred to as a gorgakh. According to the accompanying account, which appeared in virtually identical form on all such websites and videos, this mystery beast had been killed by villagers in Swabi, Pakistan, and was said to devour newly buried human corpses, purposefully digging them up out of their graves. As soon as I saw the photo, however, I recognised the gorgakh as a harmless pangolin or scaly anteater (the Indian pangolin *Manis crassicaudata* is native to Pakistan). Its great size was an artefact, created by being held much closer to the camera than any of the people standing behind it – a classic example of forced perspective. Equally fallacious were the bloodthirsty claims concerning its diet, because not only are pangolins toothless and exclusively insectivorous, they lack even the mechanical capability to chew. Another 'monster' duly de-monstified! [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwtGyb1pcbM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwtGyb1pcbM) 18 Aug 2012 and numerous online reports from the same time period.

#### TO CAMEROON FOR CRYPTIDS

Veteran field cryptozoologist Bill Gibbons informs me that he and his 18-year-old son Andrew hope to accompany fellow mystery beast seeker Michel Ballot to Cameroon in November 2012 in order to question the local pygmies about several remarkable cryptids reputedly living there. These include enormous mystery spiders known as j'ba fof, an elusive horned creature resembling a forest rhinoceros, an unidentified crocodile said to have a fish-like tail, a three-toed mystery ape called the dudu, a small red frog that apparently glows in the dark, and an aquatic cryptid dubbed the water panther – a specimen of which was allegedly killed recently, but discarded afterwards as the pygmies

didn't realise its scientific value. *Bill Gibbons, pers. comm., 31 July 2012.*

#### OXFORD'S GIANT-SIZED MYSTERY

On 16 March 2012, I received a very interesting letter from Richard George, who was up at Queen's College, Oxford, during the 1980s and 1990s. He enclosed a page from the March 2012 issue of the College's thrice-yearly newsletter, in which the Old Members' Officer, Emily Downing, had included a request for information concerning a very intriguing animal mystery that was new to me. She stated: "A gentleman recently visited the College and asked me about the demise of the giant tortoises in Front Quad. I shall readily accept that he was pulling my leg but you never know, and he left before I could really press him on this point. Can anyone else testify to the College having once (c.1930s-40s) been home to some tortoises?"

Richard confirmed: "Several Oxford college Junior Common Rooms own standard-sized chelonians, and Corpus Christi even host a summer party in which Oxford's tortoises are raced," (using lettuce cunningly held just out of their reach in order to elicit movement). However, he had no knowledge of giant tortoises ever having been maintained at his college. On 20 August, I received a second letter from him, enclosing the relevant page from the latest Queen's College newsletter, in which Emily Downing revealed that she had only received one response – an email stating that tortoises had indeed once existed there. But there was no confirmation that they had been giant tortoises. So if any *FT* reader has information on the erstwhile presence of such creatures at Queen's College, we'd love to hear from you!

In case you're wondering what this has to do with cryptozoology, there is a bona fide link. Living giant tortoises are known today only from the Galapagos Islands off Ecuador and from the Indian Ocean island of Aldabra. Just a few centuries ago, however, additional species also existed on the Seychelles, but these were believed to have been wiped out – until, in the past two decades, certain captive specimens hitherto believed to belong to the Aldabran species were unmasked by DNA and other analyses to be surviving individuals of two of the supposedly lost species from the Seychelles. Consequently, if giant tortoises did once exist at Oxford University, it is just possible that they too belonged to these formerly 'hidden' species of Seychelles giant tortoise, in turn meaning that if their bodies have been preserved and can be located, they will be of great scientific significance. *Richard George, pers. comms, 16 Mar, 20 Aug 2012.*





# ARCHÆOLOGY



Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, a founding co-editor of *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* ([www.bergjournals.com/timeandmind](http://www.bergjournals.com/timeandmind)).

## LOST LAND

The area of the North Sea between Northern Ireland, Scotland, Denmark and the Channel Islands used to be dry land. Now referred to as "Doggerland", it is believed to have been home to thousands of people before it was slowly submerged between 20,000 and 7,500 years ago. "Doggerland was the real heartland of Europe until sea levels rose to give us the UK coastline of today," says Dr Richard Bates of St Andrews University, who helped organise a recent Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition presentation in London. "We have speculated for years on the lost land's existence from bones dredged by fishermen all over the North Sea, but it's only since working with oil companies in the last few years that we have been able to re-create what this lost land looked like."

By analysis of material such as pollen grains, fossil evidence of animals (including mammoths) and plants, and tree stumps dredged up from the sea floor, plus geophysical modelling of data from oil and gas companies, the researchers were able to build up a picture of a large and complex landmass containing hills and valleys, swamps, lakes, and rivers. As the sea inched upwards, the hills would have become islands and archipelagos before finally disappearing beneath the waves themselves. There is also evidence of



## FRANKENSTEIN FINDS

In 2001, archaeologists made what has turned out to be a freaky find at the site of a prehistoric village on the Scottish island of South Uist. Two 3,000-year-old skeletons, one male, one female, were found buried in foetal positions, but they had been interred 300-600 years after their deaths. From their condition and structure, scientists determined that the bodies had initially been placed in a peat bog just long enough to preserve them (peat bogs are anaerobic and have preservative properties). The bodies had then been taken out as "bog bodies" and reburied centuries later. Now, isotopic and DNA analyses have confirmed what archaeologists already suspected – these

two former bog bodies were composite skeletons, assembled from several people. One hypothesis put forward is the mixing of remains was designed to combine different ancestries into a single lineage. DNA from the female skeleton's skull, jawbone, arm, and leg shows that the bones came from different women, though the body parts all date to around the same period. On the other hand, the male skeleton is made up from three men who died a few hundred years apart. In the female, the upper two teeth next to the front teeth had been removed and placed in each hand. All very strange – not to say creepy. *National Geographic Daily News*, 6 July; *LiveScience*, 10 July 2012.



BOTH IMAGES: UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS



ABOVE LEFT: A map showing the extent of Doggerland. ABOVE RIGHT: Dr Richard Bates of the University of St Andrews at work on the Doggerland.  
OPPOSITE PAGE: What life on Doggerland might have looked like in the simulation created by Dr Eugene Ch'ng for the Royal Society Summer Exhibition.

# CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 156. HEART OF THE TOTAL ECLIPSE

(Apologies to Bonny Tyler for titular perversion – It was the best song of 1982)

“Eclipses are special circumstances,” opined Fort (*Books*, p489), whose frequent discussions usually correlated them with other natural disasters and human phenomena.

In this, he was following his ‘thrice-accursed’ Greeks and Romans. For example, Thucydides (*History*, bk1 ch23) claims the Peloponnesian civil war witnessed an unusual number of eclipses, instancing both solar and lunar ones (bk4 ch52; bk7 ch50), the former tautochrone with an earthquake – Aristophanes (*Clouds*, v584, 423BC), joins lunar eclipse with threatened solar one.

Thucydides indicates no sign of public panic. The eclipse that did affect the war’s outcome was the lunar one of 413, frightening the superstitious general Nicias into a fatal delay of the military evacuation from Sicily.

Ancient writers loved chronological coincidences, a trait ridiculed by the historian Eunapius (fragment 1-4th cent. AD). Thus, Alexander’s decisive Persian victory at Arbela and Cæsar’s Ides assassination were both claimed to be accompanied by eclipses (Pliny, *Natural History*, bk2 ch72 para180; Virgil, *Georgic 1*, v467), though in fact they were days apart.

Writing in the *Morning Star* (19 Aug 1999) about the total solar eclipse that Mother Nature thought a suitable prelude to man-made Y2K terror – I had hoped for a concomitant lightning-bolt to level the Millennium Dome – I reflected that none of us would be around for the next one (scheduled for 2090) unless we can book a Tardis flight. As Lucy once observed to Linus in ‘Peanuts’, “You wouldn’t think it’d be that hard to get a booking for an eclipse.”

Still, in the other sense, they’ve long been booked. Homer is now regarded by American scientists Baizoukis and Magnasco (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 105, 2008, pp8823-8) as an early predictor of solar eclipses via a prophecy of the seer Theoclymenos, “The Sun is blotted out from Heaven and a malignant mist has crept upon the world” (*Odyssey*, bk20 vv356-7).

Plutarch’s essay ‘On the Far Side of the Moon’ rounds up early poetic mentions of eclipses, one of which we can date to 6 April 647 BC. Pliny (bk2 ch9 para54) alludes to verses on that of 30 April 462 BC by Pindar (fr74) and Stesichorus (lost).

Various sources (Herodotus, *Histories*, bk1 ch74; Pliny, bk2 ch9 para53; Diogenes Lærtius, *Philosophers’ Lives*, bk1 ch23) credit Thales, the earliest Greek scientist proper,

with being the first person accurately to predict and explain a solar eclipse in 585 BC, an event that terrorised the Lydians and Medes into breaking off their local war – had our 1999 one happened during NATO bombings of Yugoslavia, would – to quote ‘Beyond The Fringe’ – there suddenly and unavoidably have come peace?

Thales was doubly lucky: he had merely predicted the year. Some moderns doubt the story. He might, though, have learned something from the Babylonians. Their science was yoked to religion. By the late fifth century, Greek scientists had come up with the correct explanation of eclipses – without labs and telescopes. Yet, the leader of this pack, Anaxagoras, was tried at Athens for ‘impiety’ (Diogenes Lærtius, bk2 ch7).

Mustn’t resist subjoining that Thales was also the first absent-minded professor, once falling down a well whilst absorbed in thought (Plato, *Theætetus*, para174A) – well in, like the dormouse in ‘Alice’, a nifty gloss on Jefferson Airplane’s greatest hymn.

No surprise that the New Testament phenomenises the Crucifixion. Matthew (2:45&51), Mark (15:33&38), and Luke (23:44-5) attest an earthquake-eclipsed double-act; John interestingly offers nothing.

The Byzantines incorporate these into their Crucifixion art, depicting Sun and Moon with averted faces. Like their predecessors, they wobbled between science and superstition, predicting many solar eclipses (listed in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1991, vol1 p672), sometimes juggling dates to contrive spectacular human coincidences.

They also bequeath us a couple of agreeable anecdotes. The historian George Acropolites (ch39) recorded a discussion of eclipses at court in 1238, in which his own academic dronings were cut short by the empress calling him “a moron”. A touch of Prince Philip about that, though one doubts such seminars occur at Buck House.

Anna Comnena (*Alexiad*, bk2 ch92) tells how her royal father, Alexius I, whilst negotiating with the enemy Pechenegs (steppe-dwellers between rivers Danube and Don) was surreptitiously tipped off by an underling that an eclipse was imminent. How this minion knew is unexplained. Alexius passed on this prediction to the enemy spokesman, staking the outcome and his reputation on its truth. When the Sun went dark, the other side caved in.

What would Bush and Blair not have given for such a PR coup?

“Don’t Let The Sun Catch You Crying” – Gerry and the Pacemakers

Doggerland having suffered a huge tsunami. Human activity was evident in the dredged material by worked flints, and the researchers are investigating more such indications in the material being recovered, like possible human burial sites, apparent standing stones and a mass mammoth grave.

Dr Eugene Ch’ng of the University of Birmingham created a simulation which visitors to the Royal Society exhibition could take part in. He explained to *FT* how the simulation worked.

“We asked visitors at which location on an island, if they had been one of the ‘leaders’ of a village, they would build a settlement. It would have to provide them with food (hazel shrubs, seafood such as clams, fish, seals, and so on) but also be safe from the rising sea level. After building the settlement, the sea level would rise and the simulation would give us a result on their scores based on a complex set of equations that measures sea levels and resources within the landscapes.

“This small simulation is a part of a large-scale simulation in Complexity Science and agent-based modelling that we are doing at Birmingham in order to understand population dynamics (settlement, movements, cultural developments) in ancient times using super computers.

The modelling and simulation are computational and mathematical but draw from archaeological datasets (pollen records, climate, evidence of cultures). The research also has a public output with Virtual Reality first-hand ‘time-travel’ experience of the landscape.” *In the Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition, July 2012, presented by the Universities of Birmingham, Aberdeen, Dundee, and University of Wales Trinity Saint David; BBC News, 4 July 2012.*



DR EUGENE CH’NG, IBM VISUAL AND SPATIAL TECHNOLOGY CENTRE/DO, COLLABORATION, UNIVERSITY

## BEAR-FACED CHEEK

A round-up of recent ursine antics – including breaking, entering and stealing chocolate munchies

● The Knowles family arrived home on 13 July to find their kitchen had been ransacked by bears. They later went out for dinner, and upon returning found the place trashed again. It happened a third time the next day. Perhaps the mother bear and her cubs felt at home: after all, the Knowles family live in the hamlet of Bearsville in upstate New York. State wildlife specialists fired two shots at the mother bear, but missed. She and her cubs took off and had not been seen again at the time of the report. *[AP] 25 July 2012.*

● The following month, a family of bears broke into a holiday cabin in Jarfjord, Norway, before biting open and drinking more than 100 cans of lager. They left telltale paw prints after climbing in through a window of the 26 sq ft (2.4m<sup>2</sup>) wooden hunting ledge. They drank all the family's booze, ate all the food, including chocolate, marshmallows, honey and jam, and then trashed the place, leaving excrement and an awful stench. "They had a hell of a party in there," said the cabin's owner, Even Borthen Nilsen. "The entire cabin was destroyed. The beds and all kitchen appliances, stove, oven, cupboard and shelves were all smashed to pieces." *D.Telegraph, 13 Aug; D.Mirror, 14 Aug 2012.*

● At around midnight on 15 August, a Norwegian man driving near Hanestad village in Hedmark county, 225km (140 miles) north of Oslo, swerved to avoid a moose and hit a bear that suddenly ran in front of his car. While the driver escaped uninjured, a search party was tracking the bear after finding traces of blood. The car sustained some damage. Norway is home to around 100,000 moose, but only 150 brown bears. *[R] BBC News, 16 Aug 2012.*

● A black bear went in and out of a Colorado chocolate shop several times early one July morning, but used the front door and didn't



### The bear used the front door and didn't break a thing

break a thing. It did, however, steal munchies from the store in Estes Park, including English toffee, peanut butter cups, and some chocolate-chip cookies dipped in caramel and milk chocolate called 'cookie bears'. Surveillance video at the Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory



TOP: A young black bear wanders into a Pennsylvania Mall... ABOVE: While another pays repeated visits to a Colorado chocolate shop.

showed the bear prying open the door and grabbing confectionary near the cash registers. It took the treats outside and ate them, then returned for more, making seven trips in about 15 minutes. *[AP] 10 Aug 2012.*

● A mother bear and three cubs went on a week-long crime spree in Colorado, breaking into cars in search of food, before being caught on 30 June in Snowmass Village, a small town west of Aspen, when a woman opened her car door to find the three cubs on the back seat, peering out from behind a child's car seat, the mother having run off. *New York Daily News, 4 July 2012.*

● Shoppers at a Sears department store in the Pittsburgh Mills mall, Pennsylvania, were evacuated after a young 125lb (57kg) female bear wandered in through automatic doors on the night of 21 July and ran up and down the aisles, growling at customers. Wildlife officials shot the bear with a tranquilliser and captured it. It was wearing a tracking device. *BBC News, 22 July 2012.*

● Bartlett High School in Anchorage, Alaska, was evacuated on 14 June while police banged on doors and windows to chase a small brown bear out of the classrooms. It ran into a nearby wood. "Any trash that had any food in it was knocked over," said a policeman. "It peed in the hall at one point." *MX News (Sydney), 15 June 2012.*

● Canadian conservation officers put down a black bear they believed had eaten the remains of a convicted murderer. The bear's description matched that of one seen guarding a cache that contained human remains. Police said it was killed because bears remember food sources. It was said to have feasted on Rory Nelson Wagner after he died of natural causes on a remote logging road in British Columbia. Wagner, 54, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in 1994 and was on



ANDY DUANN

ABOVE: And another black bear falls through the air from a tree and lands on a padded mat after being hit by tranquilliser darts. The 200lb (90kg) bear had wandered onto the University of Colorado Campus in Boulder and spent most of the day there before climbing the tree. *Huffington Post, 27 April 2012.*

life parole. He had gone missing from his halfway house in May. *i, 4 June; Sydney Morning Herald, Metro, 6 June 2012.*

● A wild black bear attacked a man relaxing in a hot tub at the Whistler ski resort in western Canada. The man, 55, "felt a heavy blow to the back of his head which propelled him forward in the hot tub," police said. He turned round and found himself face to face with the bear. He was treated for lacerations, while the bear was spotted 100 yards away and shot dead. *(Sydney) D. Telegraph, 6 June 2012.*

● A wild bear on the prowl in the forests of Tyrol in Austria was feted by local people after inadvertently helping unravel the mystery of a missing man. The brown bear knocked down a tree, which fell on an electricity pylon and started a fire. Police and firefighters called

to the remote region discovered the body of Peter Hilber, 40, who had been reported missing by his wife two days earlier. The 220lb (100kg), two-and-a-half-year-old animal was named Inspector Bear by local people in place of the less catchy scientific label, M13.

The bear and his brother, M12, had been living in the border region between Austria, Switzerland and Italy for several weeks. M13 had overturned beehives, dismantled a snowmobile and killed a goat. Both animals came from a repopulation programme in Trentino, northern Italy. Their movements were being monitored by GPS tags around their necks, which sent text messages to the authorities every seven hours. M13 was in a collision with a Swiss train on 30 April, and was thought to be hiding in a cave, but was not believed to have been seriously injured. *Metro, 3 May; Guardian, 4 May 2012.*

**I**n 2009, Charlie Skelton began an entertaining and instructive blog on the Comment is Free section of the *Guardian* about his experiences at the site of the Bilderberg meeting.<sup>1</sup> Who is Skelton? I asked Wikipedia: Skelton is a British TV comedy writer/editor; a funny man with a serious side.

The serious Skelton wrote a long, carefully documented essay for CIF showing that some of the people the English-speaking world sees on TV as the public face of the opposition in Syria had come from the ranks of the Anglo-American foreign policy groups: the Council on Foreign Relations, Bilderberg, the Ford Foundation, George Soros's Open Society Foundation, Chatham House; and, further, that considerable amounts of US government money is funding these Syrian opposition groups.<sup>2</sup> Well, duh!, might be one reaction: how else do you become leaders of the opposition to a Middle Eastern government except by cuddling-up to the Americans? And, duh!, who else is going to fund such groups? (The unsayable is that Syria is merely a supporting player in the 30-year conflict between Iran and the US.)

So far so utterly inoffensive, you might think. But not for Julian Borger, the *Guardian's* Washington correspondent, whose splenetic reply vigorously thrashed several straw men and accused Skelton of being a conspiracy theorist – something Skelton was very careful not to be.<sup>3</sup> Which nicely illustrated the way the terms 'conspiracy theory' and 'conspiracy theorist' are used by mainstream media (MSM) figures to denigrate what is not on their agenda. And their use by MSM figures often indicates areas of political sensitivity, as it does in this instance.

But what is sensitive about public information on the careers of Syrian opposition leaders? I can only suppose either that we are not supposed to know that American money and power are supporting the overthrow of the Assad regime, and to believe that the uprising is entirely spontaneous; or that we are not supposed to know that these Anglo-American foreign policy groups have a role in the promotion of political leaders. And since those foreign policy groups are another aspect of American political power (the British role in this process is minor) we may conclude that it is that power which is sensitive. Even though America has been the big dog in the kennel since 1945, we are still apparently not supposed to notice that the UK's geopolitical role has shrunk to that of its head cheerleader and off-shore host for its banks. National decline often produces conspiracy theories to explain it. In the 1950s, sections of the British right, the security and intelligence services and the Conservative Party began blaming British decline on the great communist conspiracy. This peaked with the so-called anti-subversion lobby of the 1970s – intelligence officers, mostly – which claimed that Moscow controlled the trade unions, the trade unions ran the Labour Party and so Moscow ran Labour.<sup>4</sup> Harold Wilson was a KGB agent! There was a red cell in No. 10! (Mrs Thatcher believed something like this; she was briefed by the anti-subversion lobby and talked of 'the enemy within'.) But the fall of the Soviet bloc killed that theory; since when the only candidate theory to explain our decline has been the European integration, it's-all-a-Brussels-plot story, which hasn't resonated with many outside of the south east.

#### NOTES

1 [www.guardian.co.uk/world/series/charlie-skeltons-bilderberg-files](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/series/charlie-skeltons-bilderberg-files)

2 [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jul/12/syrian-opposition-doing-the-talking](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jul/12/syrian-opposition-doing-the-talking)

3 [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jul/13/us-manipulation-news-syria-red-herring](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jul/13/us-manipulation-news-syria-red-herring)

4 One of the lobby's leading figures, Brian Crozier, died in August. See [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/politics/obituaries/9462513/Brian-Crozier.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/politics/obituaries/9462513/Brian-Crozier.html)



## NECROLOG

We note the passing of a teenage saboteur of the Third Reich, a trail-blazing American publisher and the world's leading expert on cuneiform

### JEAN JÜLICH

Jülich was one of the last surviving members of the Edelweiss Pirates, a group of teenage tearaways who formed a resistance network against the Nazis. The Pirates – named after the edelweiss emblem they wore on their collars or hats – had emerged out of a non-political youth hiking movement of the 1930s called the 'Bündische Jugend', in response to the strict regimentation of the Hitler Youth. A loose-knit group based in and around Cologne, they were working-class boys and girls, mainly aged 14 to 17, who had evaded the Hitler Youth by leaving school while still young enough to avoid military conscription. They taunted and fought pitched battles with the Hitler Youth, from whom they distanced themselves by growing long hair, sporting brightly coloured shirts and singing popular songs that owed nothing to the German Volkish music approved by the Nazis. "We wore our hair long, we had a knife in our sock, and we wouldn't march," Jülich recalled.

As the war progressed, the Pirates became involved in serious resistance. Besides writing graffiti and distributing leaflets, including those dropped by the Allies, they stole food and explosives for small local adult resistance groups. Some offered shelter to German army deserters or escaped prisoners from the camps, while others went in for sabotage. Jülich recalled how he and his friends threw bricks through munitions factory windows and poured sugar into the petrol tanks of Nazis' cars. Other groups derailed train carriages loaded with munitions. By 1944 as many as 5,000 teenagers were involved. The Gestapo declared the group criminals, and gang members were often rounded up and – if they were lucky – released with their heads shaved; others were sent to camps or executed.

Jülich was seven when his father, a member of the Communist Party, was sentenced to 10 years' hard labour. He joined the Pirates in 1942, and was arrested with friends in 1944, accused of



plotting to bomb the local Gestapo headquarters. Sent to a concentration camp, he survived torture, starvation and typhus before being liberated by the Americans. He became the proprietor of a popular 'music pub' in Cologne and in 1984 was declared a "righteous Gentile" by Israel. In 1988, the Edelweiss Pirates were collectively recognised as "Righteous among the Nations" by Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial, but it wasn't until 2005 that they were politically rehabilitated by the German government. Their criminal records were annulled and they were recognised as "resistance fighters". The long delay was partly because they had refused to become involved in the officially sanctioned political youth groups formed under Allied supervision after the war, and continued to be regarded as outlaws.

*Jean Jülich, resistance fighter, born Cologne 18 April 1929; died 19 Oct 2011, aged 82.*

### BARNEY ROSSET

Rosset was the most influential avant-garde publisher of the 20th century. He was also one of the boldest, winning celebrated battles against censorship. Born in Chicago, the only son of a wealthy Jewish banker and an Irish Catholic mother, he was radically minded from an early age and always savoured a fight. With his best friend at school, the future cinematographer Haskell Wexler, he produced a paper called *Anti-*

*Everything*. After service in the US Army's Signal Corps in China during World War II, he produced a documentary, *Strange Victory* (1948), showing that the freedoms America had fought for in Europe and the Pacific were not fully realised at home; it cost him \$250,000 to make and sank like a stone. After a spell in Paris he settled in New York where in 1951 he bought a moribund press on Grove Street in Greenwich Village for \$3,000.

Grove Press, as he called it, published an obscure play called *Waiting for Godot* in 1954. By the time its author Samuel Beckett won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969, Grove (and its offshoot, the magazine *Evergreen Review*, founded by Rosset in 1957) had transformed the American cultural landscape. Rosset started the ball rolling with *Tropic of Cancer*, Henry Miller's account of his early life and sexual adventures in Paris, where it was published in 1934. It was long banned in the US, but Rosset bought a smuggled copy as a student.

To prepare the way, he planned to publish an unexpurgated version of DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which he thought commanded greater respect than *Tropic*. He notified the postal authorities that he was (illegally) sending the book in the mail. It was confiscated, setting in motion a legal battle that ended in 1959 with the book's first US publication, a year before the British edition. Rosset then bought the rights to *Tropic* from Miller for \$50,000 and published the book in 1961, to be buried under an avalanche of more than 60 lawsuits. Grove won in 1964, when the American Supreme Court reversed a Florida ban, bringing all the cases to a halt. It held that *Tropic* had "redeeming social value" and was not, therefore, obscene. Rosset called it "a breach in the dam of American Puritanism".

Grove had become "the voice of the underground". Rosset stood apart from his peers, not only in his willingness to challenge prohibitions, but also in being able to

fund the action. Grove introduced American readers to Harold Pinter, Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet, Jack Kerouac, Tom Stoppard, Octavio Paz, Marguerite Duras, and Alain Robbe-Grillet. It published works by Frank O'Hara, LeRoi Jones, David Mamet, John Rechy, and Alexander Trocchi. Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" appeared in the second issue of the *Evergreen Review*. In 1962 Rosset published William S Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (Norman Mailer and Ginsberg were among the defence witnesses at the inevitable trial). Other bestsellers included Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn* and Eric Berne's *Games People Play* (both 1964); Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (both 1965).

Rosset incurred heavy losses due to the costs of defending his books in court, and by the end of the 1960s other publishers were hitching a ride on his coat tails. He diversified into films, and went to court to overturn a ban on the Swedish soft porn film *I Am Curious (Yellow)* (1967), to which he had bought the US rights. The film made him millions, but other foreign films whose rights he had bought flopped at the box office. There was also a backlash from a new breed of radical feminists, who condemned as sexist the titillating novels that had always featured prominently on Grove's list. *Life* magazine published a profile of Rosset under the title "The Old Smut Peddler". In 1985 Grove was in serious trouble and Rosset sold out to George Weidenfeld and Ann



Getty. The name survives as part of the publisher Grove-Atlantic. Rosset is survived by four children and his fifth wife.

*Barnet Lee Rosset Jr, publisher, born Chicago 28 May 1922; died New York 21 Feb 2012, aged 89.*

### WILFRED LAMBERT

Professor Wilfred Lambert, born into a Christadelphian family in Birmingham, was the world's leading expert on cuneiform, which began as a system of pictographs and over three millennia developed into a more simplified and abstract script. His skill both in deciphering texts and spotting joins (identifying pieces that belonged together) was unrivalled. In 2009 he helped the British Museum shed light on the famous Cyrus Cylinder, often described (though controversially) as containing the world's first Declaration of Human Rights. The inscribed clay cylinder, now broken into several fragments, was excavated in Babylon in 1879, and bears a declaration in Akkadian cuneiform script in the name of the Achaemenid king Cyrus the Great after his conquest of the city in 539 BC. It authorises the return of deported peoples to their homelands and implies that there will be freedom of religious expression throughout the Persian Empire. This chimes with the biblical tradition portraying Cyrus as an enlightened ruler.

Lambert examined two clay fragments of cuneiform tablet from a site in Dailem, near Babylon, which had been in the British Museum since 1881. Working with Irving Finkel from the museum's Middle East department, he established that the pieces came from a tablet inscribed with the identical text as the Cyrus Cylinder. Traditionally, the Cylinder was thought to have been simply a building inscription, in the Babylonian and Assyrian tradition, commemorating Cyrus's restoration of the city of Babylon. Lambert's discovery, however, lent support to the hypothesis that the "declaration" was an imperial decree distributed around Cyrus's empire, and which the author of the book of Ezra may have drawn upon when writing about the king.

*Wilfred George Lambert, Assyriologist, born Birmingham 26 Feb 1926; died 9 Nov 2011, aged 85.*

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



### A SOUTH AFRICAN PLUMBER DIED

AFTER the dog lead he wore around his neck in tribute to his favourite pet got caught in the wheel of his car. Rob Emslie, 47, had been wearing his dead dog Sheeveh's lead in a noose around his neck when he got into his 4x4 after a night out on 11 June at a restaurant near the Kragga Kamma nature reserve in South Africa's Eastern Cape region. He accidentally slammed his car door on the 10ft (3m) nylon rope lead, with the end trailing outside the vehicle. As he reversed, the lead became entangled in a front wheel axle. The force snapped his neck, killing him instantly. [telegraph.co.uk](http://telegraph.co.uk), 11 June 2012

### GEOFFREY HAYWOOD, 65, SPENT YEARS

pretending to be blind – then fell into a ditch and drowned. He walked with a white stick, used a talking watch and had carers to look after him – but the former mechanic, born with just one ear, could see perfectly well. "He had psychological blindness which started [10 years ago] with the death of our mother," his brother Howard told an inquest in Newport, South Wales. "I'd put Christmas dinner in front of him and he would say 'Where's mine?' But if someone dropped money he would pick it up straight away. I believe he used it as a way of convincing people to take pity on him and help him." A neighbour said: "Wherever he went you could hear the tapping of his cane. But you didn't have to be with him for long to realise he could see as well as anyone else." He went missing from sheltered accommodation near Newport in March, and his body was found in a flooded ditch 150 yards (137m) away a week later. Coroner David Bowen said: "Either he didn't see or didn't want to see the ditch, slipped and drowned." The headline in the *Sun* (28 July 2012): "Blind Man's Bluff".

ISABEL TAYLOR (16), CONVERTED TO Buddhism, became a vegan and animal rights campaigner, and ran a guinea pig sanctuary with a friend. On 24 September 2011 she hanged herself in her bedroom in Neston, Wiltshire, after becoming convinced the world would end in 2012 – specifically from a nuclear reactor meltdown. Her parents said she couldn't bear the prospect of growing up in a world that wasn't "simple and perfect". *Western Daily Press, D.Mirror, 18 May 2012.*

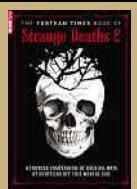
**A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD INDIAN GIRL WAS**  
ritually sacrificed to the goddess  
Durga by two farmers desperate for a  
good harvest. Lalita Tati was abducted  
as she left a neighbour's house in the  
remote village of Jailwara in the central  
Indian state of Chhattisgarh. A week

later, her parents found her body, missing  
heart and liver, close to the village pond. There  
was money by her feet and head, indicating  
that a sacrifice had been offered. Lalita is  
believed to have been targeted by the farmers,  
Ignesh Kujur and Padam Sukku, because they  
were in a feud with her father, Budhram, whom  
they suspected of casting black magic spells.  
Villagers said the men cut Lalita's throat and  
offered her organs to Durga in the hope that  
she would bless their harvest. Local mythology  
has it that crops will flourish if a sacrificial  
victim is younger than 12. The murder took  
place on 21 October 2011, but the farmers  
were not arrested until the following January,  
having confessed to the victim's father. *Sunday  
Times, 8 Jan 2012.*

IDENTICAL TWINS PATRICIA AND JOAN Miller sang and danced for Bing Crosby, troops and friends, and were television stars in the 1950s. For the last 40 years they shut themselves up in a small house in South Lake Tahoe, California, apparently content with each other's company. They were found dead, aged 73, on 26 February. Medical investigators were unable to determine cause of death, but their decomposed bodies suggest they had been dead for at least several weeks. There was no blood, no signs of struggle and nothing indicated that they had persistent health troubles. "My perception is that one died and the other couldn't handle it," said Detective Matt Harwood from El Dorado County sheriff's office. Exactly a month later, on 26 March, twin sisters aged 50 were found dead in Beulah Hill, Upper Norwood, London. No one had seen them for months. One theory was that had succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning. *D.Mail, (Melbourne) Age, 8 Mar; This is Croydon, 26 Mar; Eve. Standard, 27 Mar 2012.*

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## FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLogy

### SEEING SPRITES

Six years ago the Ministry of Defence released its Condign report on 'Unidentified Aerial Phenomena' (UAP). The study concluded that UAPs, as Defence Intelligence preferred to call UFOs, existed but were most likely a type of poorly understood atmospheric plasma related to ball lightning. Press coverage of the report's conclusions was superficial and believers in extraterrestrial craft were unimpressed. But evidence that some, if not all, the 'unidentified' UFOs are types of atmospheric plasmas keeps piling up.

In April, NASA released images showing bursts of red light known as 'sprites' that were captured by astronauts on the International Space Station. Sprites are elusive and visible for only one thousandth of a second. Scientists believe that sprites, like other types of UAP, are related to lightning, in this case in the form of an electrical discharge 50 miles (80km) above thunderstorms. Their elusive nature – as befits their name – explains why it took so long for these and related atmospheric phenomena to be identified and categorised. Pilots had reported seeing sprites for decades before scientists accidentally caught one on camera in 1989. It may take many more decades before the relationship between UAPs in the mesosphere and UFOs sighted in the lower atmosphere can be proved. See **FT86:14, 178:13**. <http://bit.ly/MYkhTo> (Science Daily); sprite images and videos: <http://bit.ly/U45Hav> (phys.org)

### ONE UFO PER MONTH?

Air Traffic controllers receive reports of flying objects "that don't conform to normal flight patterns" every month, the head of Britain's National Air Traffic Control Services has admitted. Towards the end of an interview on BBC Radio 4's Today programme (17 August 2012), chief executive Richard Deakin was pressed for a Yes/No answer. His response was: "It's a yes... not just in the UK but around the world, typically around one a month." Presenter Simon Jack appeared surprised by Deakin's admission, as it appeared to suggest the "skies are buzzing with UFOs".

But a far more accurate litmus test of how frequent reports of 'UFOs' (or UAPs) by aircrew actually are can be found in the records kept by the Civil Aviation Authority, the government agency that employs NATS to run air traffic services in the UK. Although not designed specifically to capture UFO data, the CAA database logs any sightings reported by aircrew



– whether in UK airspace or elsewhere in the world – and is subject to Freedom of Information requests. The response to our most recent FOI requests reveals that 10 'mandatory occurrence reports' involving 'unidentified objects' were logged by the authority between December 2004 and October 2011. This figure suggests that Richard Deakin's guesstimate of one per month refers to a larger body of sighting reports that never make it onto the CAA's database. Logically, we should expect the numbers of MORs to be nearer 80 for the six years ending in 2011. However, it is well known that aircrew and ATC controllers are reluctant to file UFO sighting reports because they wish to avoid publicity and others fear the effect it could have on their flying careers. *BBC Radio 4*: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_9745000/9745210.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9745000/9745210.stm); *Huffington Post*, 28 August: <http://huff.to/PLGEuk>

### WHEN THE GOING GETS WEIRD

Ufology, as we know, is not what it used to be. But there is still some genuinely puzzling weirdness out there – and people with tales to tell that are so bizarre they almost ask to be sneered at out of hand. Ignoring them won't make them go away, so every now and again it pays to look at what's happening. Take Sacha Christie for example. Sacha's an 'experiencer'. Yeah, I know, we sceptics don't take any notice of them. But listen and read about the multi-witness experience she underwent while on a weekend away in Wales. It changed forever the lives of several people, and not for the good. Did Sacha make this up? If so, why? If not, what really happened to her? Just because something is weird beyond

belief doesn't mean it should be disregarded out of hand. Sacha is also a bit of a mover and shaker in contemporary grass roots ufology, and her contentious views on events such as Rendlesham are worth hearing. Sacha won't be to everyone's taste but she represents one aspect of modern ufology as it is played out in Internet discussion groups and the small conferences and meetings that still take place all over the UK. [sacha-christie-infomaniahousewife.blogspot.co.uk](http://sacha-christie-infomaniahousewife.blogspot.co.uk); [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FOU-hCK3eY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FOU-hCK3eY)

### SILLY SEASON

Ufology has a permanent underbelly of stupidity, wishful thinking and the ability to delude itself in the hope that thinking something will 'make it so'.

On 5 September, a phenomenon was observed in the sky above Moscow. Several people filmed a huge, circular 'hole' in the clouds, and media and ufological speculation was rife that it was a "disc-shaped UFO using a cloaking technique". There was talk of advanced military technology, alien craft and all manner of what have you. Take a look. What do you see? It's not an 'object', as many people have claimed, it's a meteorological phenomenon caused by the clouds just happening to leave a circle where they are absent. It's unusual, as is a great deal of meteorological phenomena, but this is join-the-dots ufology – of a type we've seen a thousand times before – in which a natural phenomenon is re-framed as an unusual object. But if you want it to be a UFO masked by a cloaking device, have it your own way! <http://news.gather.com/viewArticle.action?articleId=281474981612840>

## I'M THE SLIME!

*FT* recently carried a fascinating article by Scott Deschaine (FT291:30-35) speculating that some UFOs might be creatures within the Earth's atmosphere. Fortean research is full of synchronicities, of course, so it's no surprise to discover a UFO sighting from 6 July 2012 that hints at something similar. Following coverage in the *Guardian* of the MoD UFO files, 'Sam', in his 60s, decided to report what he and his wife experienced on a warm summer's night that turned into a "living nightmare".

It was just after 1am as they were passing through Northamptonshire en route for Birmingham airport to pick up their son. On the A45 near Daventry they spotted a large, low, bright light that they assumed to be an aircraft coming into land. They were driving at 45mph (72km/h) and were catching up with the light when it suddenly disappeared. Moments later, their car windscreen was hit by a wall of slime, leaving them virtually blind.

Understandably 'Sam' stopped, desperate to clear the mess. But nothing worked – not even a bottle of mineral water tossed over the screen. Concerned, they drove on carefully, pulling over repeatedly to try to clear the muck. By 2am they had to stop in an isolated lay-by and call the AA, who, despite scepticism at the story of a mysterious light dumping slime onto a car, dispatched a mechanic.

By now, the weather had turned misty and damp and the outside temperature gauge was showing a dramatic rise to 25°C. The mechanic arrived and was baffled; having checked the engine, wipers, cooling system and air conditioning, he could find nothing wrong. But as he investigated, the goo started to clear and the temperature returned to normal.

'Sam' and his wife drove on to collect their son, and the rest of the journey proved uneventful. Afterwards, the car went to the garage for a check-up to and was found to be in perfect order. Meanwhile, 'Sam' contacted the Civil Aviation Authority to discover if an aircraft could have sprayed them with jet fuel, but the answer was 'no'. Next, he googled the location of the incident, only to find it had quite a history with UFOs.

It all sounds very strange, but I checked with a car mechanic who suggested that the slime could be the result of a warm, moist environment and a mould that emerges from de-icing equipment in unusual conditions – and the British summer of 2012 offered plenty of those! Yet the car systems were checked by two mechanics, so why was this not found?

Could an aircraft have passed low over the car? I accessed data on the flights that passed over the A45 around that time. The closest match was at around 1.40am, when a Boeing 757 from Egypt flew parallel with their course for a few moments descending through 6,000 feet and turning to land (possibly causing its lights to disappear from their perspective).

Occasionally, as an aircraft gets close to landing, rising temperatures thaw frozen



## Moments later, the windscreen was hit by a wall of slime

deposits accumulated on its fuselage. Slime or sludge from toilet systems has also fallen to earth. Some scientists suspect that, because such falls predate the birth of flight, these blobs might even be micro-comets that make it through the atmosphere.

UFOs have also long been associated with aerial deposits. *Pwdré sér* – also known as star jelly or star rot – is a sort of slime believed to fall from the air, although is thought by some to be due to fungi or bacteria (See FT283:22, 286:11). But in ufology the most common type is 'angel hair', fine filaments falling beneath an unidentified object, though again this phenomenon is argued to a natural phenomenon such as spider threads.

And what of the Daventry UFO hot spot? The area where this incident occurred is riddled with close encounters. Just a couple of miles south of the A45, the retired head of a teachers' centre was travelling from Daventry to the village of Church Stowe on 22 November 1978 when she passed below a strange, brightly-lit object that caused the engine and

lights to lose power and produced weird time discontinuities.

Four miles away, at Preston Capes, some young women driving from Byfield to Northampton found their car losing power as an object paced their vehicle before it "switched off abruptly like a lightbulb". I spoke to the driver and she told me: "The car was perfectly OK after that night. I have no idea why it suddenly lost power when the lights appeared." One of these women was subsequently hypnotised and noted how, among other things, when the light appeared she felt herself getting "hotter and hotter", just as 'Sam's' temperature gauge did.

Intriguingly, as the above cases were occurring, a novel by science fiction writer Ian Watson was published. *Miracle Visitors* is a great fictional discussion of close encounter cases. I contacted Watson to suggest he had hit upon some important real UFO topics, and he wasn't surprised to hear of actual cases mirroring his ideas. Nor should I have been surprised to find him then living in a small village in Northamptonshire – right amidst all the activity reported above!

Curious indeed – but what about a report from 22 July 2003 where a witness saw two jellyfish-like objects passing over his home, just like those on the cover of the aforementioned issue of *Fortean Times*? They seemed to be made of brownish jelly that was pulsating and making a swishing noise.

And where exactly did this happen? Daventry, of course.

# FBI FORTEAN BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION



## 121. Going ape in Devon

**ORRIN HARE** finds that the Centre for Fortean Zoology's annual **Weird Weekend** is still crazy after 13 years...

**T**his year's Weird Weekend began, perhaps surprisingly, with a short film about an alien.

An alien and his pet sheep, driving around looking for people to experiment on. To the tune of David Peel's "I Like Marijuana".

Centre for Fortean Zoology (CFZ) founder Jon Downes narrated: "It wasn't because he was a bad alien. It wasn't because he was an uncaring alien. It was just because he was completely obsessed with probing people and world domination."

This kind of incorrigible deviancy and refusal to be tamed has always been one of the hallmarks of Downes's approach. It's one of the things that make the CFZ's Weird Weekend so much fun. But there's a real core of investigation and engagement beneath the silliness, surrealism and frequent references to anarcho-punk legends Crass. Increasingly respectable, but still pulsing with the vigorous life of a weed in a window box, the CFZ has continued to flourish, demonstrating precisely the kind of honey badger tenacity that has made its annual conference an unlikely success.

From humble beginnings in a Scout hut in Exeter, the Weird Weekend is now firmly embedded in the beautiful North Devon village of Woolfardisworthy, and on 17 August, for the 13th consecutive year, it opened its doors for three days of monsters, ghosts and... well, there were no UFOs this year due to a last-minute cancellation.

Friday was a late start, which gave everyone a chance to recover after Thursday night's rain-lashed but highly entertaining cocktail party.

While nominally a cryptozoological organisation, the CFZ has always had a much broader range of obsessions, having carved out its own niche in the ecosystem of the odd by introducing the idea of 'Fortean Zoology'. The Weird Weekend reflects its mother



organisation in its range of speakers. There are scientists – look, there's hair expert and regular CFZ collaborator Dr Lars Thomas from Copenhagen University, talking perfectly reasonably about the ins-and-outs of Scandinavian cryptozoology – but there are also explorers, authors, friends-just-having-a-go, and the plain potty.

After the team's traditional opening talk entitled "What is Cryptozoology?" – CFZ zoological director Richard Freeman offers up "two fat drunks with beards" – it fell to author Paul Screeton to kick off this year's event by taking us through his many years of research into the infamous Hexham Heads.

A classic piece of fortean nightmare fuel, the story of the Hexham Heads has turned many a teenager's blood cold and bedsheets damp with its strange constellation of werewolves, night-terrors, weresheep (!) and poltergeist phenomena, all whirling around the discovery by schoolboy Colin Robson of two indescribably creepy stone or stone-like heads of indeterminate age.

Screeton – who investigated the case when it was still relatively fresh

– closed in on the details, making the story far more complicated – full of self-proclaimed psychics and local pranksters – than it usually appears. There were even extra heads flying about – an earlier one – if anything actually scarier than the later discoveries, but of identical size and style – was made by Robson a fortnight before he 'found' the two infamous Hexham Heads. Some kind of precognition at work? The Romano British cult of the severed head recurring, *Owl Service*-like, through later generations of settlers? With this story, perhaps we'll never know...

The Heads themselves were passed around and mislaid, although they might have been stolen by a fanatical collector seen prowling around "with a boot full of Celtic heads and an African princess in the passenger seat". The scientist who studied the Heads and proclaimed them to be carved from solid stone rather than cement was the author of a book on the fringe 'Stone Tape' theory of mineral memory. Needless to say, he also vanished without a trace, taking the only extant pieces of the original Heads with him and is now rumoured to be living in Malibu.

It's hard to follow the Hexham Heads, but daredevil – I hesitate to use the word "fanatical" – twitcher Richard Thorns had a good stab at it, with the tale of his three beautifully quixotic expeditions into the inaccessible swamps of Myanmar in search of the pink-headed duck: a bird feared extinct for half a century. A classic example of the Weird Weekend's emphasis on homespun derring-do, Thorns laid out the extraordinary subterfuge necessary to go birdwatching off the beaten track in a country where foreigners are banned from visiting all but a few Government-approved hotels. Locals helping him faced possible detention and torture – but that's a small price to pay for seeing a pink-headed duck!

Saturday is traditionally The Big One, with 11 hours of talks and equally traditional overruns. We were eased into it by Nick Wadham's "Bugfest Deadly Animal Show", which showcased the baffling ability of children to smile while being clambered on by giant bugs, scorpions and snakes.

The lectures also started with a bug, as Max Blake showed us a good example of how to use character analysis of known species to identify an unknown insect, in this case the mysterious and possibly-spectral 'Borley Bug' of Borley ("the most haunted house in Britain") Rectory fame. (It was probably a dragonfly.)

Scientists have been attracted into the orbit of the CFZ, but the prime movers are more properly naturalists, of the amateur, Gerald Durrell variety.



And like all good naturalists, they know every inch of their 'patch'. This was something exemplified by big cat researcher Jonathan McGowan's roundup of the activity around his stomping ground in Devon, a presentation that demonstrated a profound, personal knowledge of the topography and wildlife of the local area.

Indeed, this emphasis on personal, amateur endeavour – getting involved, getting your feet muddy and looking for yourself – might be the most important characteristic of the CFZ's approach to cryptozoology. "This is not just a conference for you to come and hear talks," Downes declared at one point. "It's a place where researchers can meet other researchers to help solve some of the mysteries of this field."

But it's not all Gore-Tex and outdoor adventures. A more bookish approach was demonstrated by author Glen Vaudry, who sped case-by-case through at least two centuries of purported "Sea Serpent" carcasses washed up on Scottish beaches and managed in under an hour to thoroughly discredit the lot of them!

Similarly, rheumatologist Jan Bondeson, much celebrated on the fortean circuit and a star of many an UnConvention, destroyed something melancholy and beautiful by telling us how the famed Greyfriars Bobby – the faithful little Skye Terrier who spent 14 years guarding his master's grave – was in fact a publicity stunt involving a trained pooch. The Weird Weekend must be one of the few places where you can listen to the world's leading expert on gout talk about a fraudulent mourning dog.

After the world premiere of director Graham Williamson's low-budget film "Heads", loosely based on the Hexham case, the evening was rounded off by actor Silas Hawkins doing his best to

ABOVE: Weird Weekenders assemble!

TOP RIGHT: Dr Lars Thomas heads into the field with (hopefully) the next generation of Gerald Durrells...

## There's an emphasis on getting your feet muddy

spook us with a bedtime story from Richard Freeman's new book of British horror tales, *Green Unpleasant Land*.

Sunday opened with established CFZer Richard Muirhead putting a plastic Devo hat on top of a tiny fez and talking about the flying snake of Namibia. It turns out that the discoverer of the coelacanth once investigated this dragon-like beast from local folklore, and that a giant, undiscovered species of cobra was at the root of the whole story.

Lars Thomas, the Danish scientist who does most of the DNA work for samples gathered from CFZ expeditions, spoke next on Danish cryptozoology in an excellent talk that covered everything from new species of fly to trolls. His study of early Danish troll sightings included a famous 16<sup>th</sup>-century church carving nicknamed "Floppy-tits the Troll", which he linked to the tradition of drooping breasts reported in mystery hominids worldwide. Equally interesting was his observation that the little-known aquatic habits of moose – they are excellent swimmers and have been reported to dive under water in search of food – might be a factor in many Scandinavian lake monster sightings.

Of all the places to which the CFZ has sent expeditions, it is the island of Sumatra that seems to keep calling them back. And of all cryptids, it seems that the orang-pendek, the



upright, walking ape of the Sumatran jungles, must be closest to discovery. Past CFZ expeditions have delivered hair, tracks and even a visual sighting of the animal. This time, reporting back after his *fourth* trip to the Kerinci tiger preserve, Richard Freeman made the quite startling announcement that for the first time ever, a handprint had been found and cast. Photographs appeared to show a hand with a completely different structure to that of the arboreal Sumatran orang-utan, looking closer to that of a small gorilla, which would fit the orang-pendek's traditional description as a terrestrial ape. Sadly, Sahar Dimus, guide for all four of the CFZ's Sumatran expeditions, orang-pendek witness and tiger shaman, died shortly after the trip at the age of only 43.

Empires rise, empires fall, but the CFZ ploughs on, a creaking Noah's Ark of oddballs, leaving a bewildering oil-slick of books, magazines, films and, yes, evidence in its wake. And one event – the Weird Weekend – that for the last 13 years has invited one-and-all to a tiny village in Devon, to find cryptids, companionship and connection within Jon Downes's ample bosom.

Of course, every now and again the mask slips and Mr Punch pops out, grinning, sticking out his tongue and frightening the scientists...

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Orrin Hare is a Cambridge-educated science writer and survivor of four international cryptozoological expeditions looking for unlikely animals in unlikely places. He lives with three cats in a small cottage in Walthamstow, where he makes music and pretends to be a gentleman, a scholar and an acrobat.

# HALLOWE

OSSIAN BROWN shares a unique collection of photographs recording the ghosts of Hallowe'en past from his book *Haunted Air*

# A

child holds out swollen black fruit. His face is intent and uneasy. Another crouches cat-like and goat-horned beside a gate. Vagabond urchins jostle before the lens, bearing harvest tokens and a promise of mischief, clutching at trinkets, at each other. Adults appear in formal poses. Rural types, for the most part, in overalls

and shabby-fine dresses, warlock costume and funeral suit, executioner's hood, hierophant's robes. They gather in parlour and decked-out civic hall; assemble in the shade of fruit tree and clapboard house, by cellar door and storm drain, in neatly tended garden, at the church gate. Solemn as their offspring are riotous with delinquent dreams. Around them, electric air crackles with early frost and thunder static. Gasoline. Turpentine. Wood smoke. Corn, trussed, stacked and ready. Forlorn scarecrows abandoned in the remnant of this year's crops. Trick or treat?

Hallowe'en: a night of feast and famine, plenitude and dearth as, summer fled and the spectre of winter's pitiless dominion at the door, October slips into November. A vagrant ritual is reborn and re-enacted in chilly Midwestern regions. An ancient mourning of the Sun's demise, Summer's End, once marked on hilltop and deep in woodland clearings with vast wild fire and the spilling of beast blood, now transplanted into the rich, black soil of America. The dark is rising over remote backwater hamlets, over railyard and schoolhouse and sharp-angled roof; over homestead and woodpile. Hallowe'enland. A world invaded, infested, dissolved, remade, and revealed.

Geoff Cox, from his afterword to *Haunted Air*

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**A VAGRANT RITUAL  
IS REBORN AND  
RE-ENACTED IN  
CHILLY MIDWESTERN  
REGIONS**

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# ENGLAND





find the discovery of each new photograph enthralling. The deep strangeness that some of these images exude is completely absorbing and a great inspiration to me. I'm only interested in pictures that carry a very particular, yet unpredictable, mood - a sideways black comedy, an elusive humour or an alien beauty, an unintentional twist not intended by the photographer or the models.

Part of the thrill of collecting is that you don't know where it will lead. I didn't immediately realise I was creating a book. *Haunted Air* happened almost in secret, when I wasn't looking. I searched for these photographs for 10 years, and as each new picture appeared I wondered just

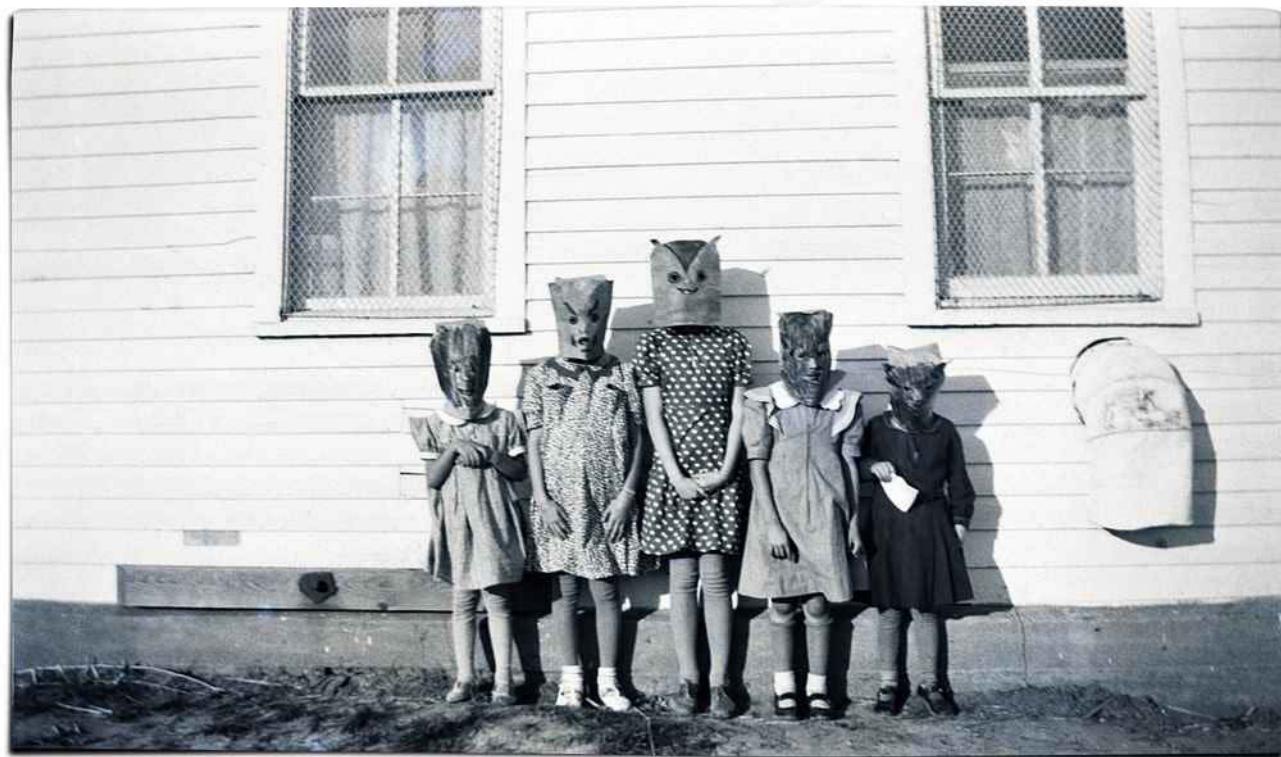
## BONE CHIMERAS, MUTANT CHILDREN POSING WITH THE SHROUDED DEAD

how many more there could be. One after another they came, an endless phantom carriage of skeletons and spectres, all of them shaking their death rattles at me. I slowly, gradually found myself seeking these pictures from dealers, photography collections and market stalls. They span

about 80 years, from the 1870s to the 1950s, and include silver gelatin prints, glass plates, tintypes, old negatives, cabinet photographs and box camera prints. The subject matter and implications, too, have taken me through unexpected terrain. It's thrilling and also disturbing not knowing where you're going, following shades holding out their gauze-clad hands. Hallowe'en cannot always be so easily corralled into the cute and the spooky; the shapes the dark can take are sometimes uncomfortably up-to-date.

What's most essential to me is a sense of magic and inner truth. I'm not interested in images that project self-consciousness or contrivance. It's important that each captured moment has complete integrity,





a ghostly conviction, where normality has been dissolved. You're no longer witnessing a human being hiding behind a mask, but a phantasmagorical manifestation, mutated in the moment, seen through a torn veil. Each picture has its own private magic, but taken in sequence they become a phantom community, a haunted universe filled with family grotesques, nightmarish with their

melting cartoon heads. Bone chimeras, mutant children posing with the shrouded dead, delinquent bat-boys in corpse drag, dwarf crones holding black balloons, lonely wraiths and strays...

In most of *Haunted Air*, the models are masked; indeed they become masks. They're rootless, ripped from their original living context, lost in time, unrecognisable to friends or relatives – stranded revenants. The fact that these photographs were very often torn from family photo albums and sold by relatives, perhaps bought by strangers in house clearance sales after someone had died, evokes a great melancholy. And of course most, if not all, of the models themselves are now dead, the pictures severed from anything that could connect them to home, to the faces behind the masks. Only the locations, or the handwritten notes on the back, offer clues. Sometimes even these notes are opaque and mysterious. One especially enigmatic example that springs to mind reads: "Oh you kids with the heavy eyes".

I'm excited by pictures where a natural mutation has occurred, not just in the condition of the photograph, with mould



spots and tears creating new and unimagined landscapes, but also from the passing down and inheritance of a costume, perhaps over decades. The perishing of fabric and the rotting of early rubber due to chemical instabilities creates sinister, puzzling abnormalities in a mask or costume that might once have been purely conventional in its 'scary' intentions. Time and repeated wear have caused a beautiful metamorphosis, a surrealism never intended or imagined. It's a disorientating 'wrongness' that I find completely bewitching and remarkable. **FT**

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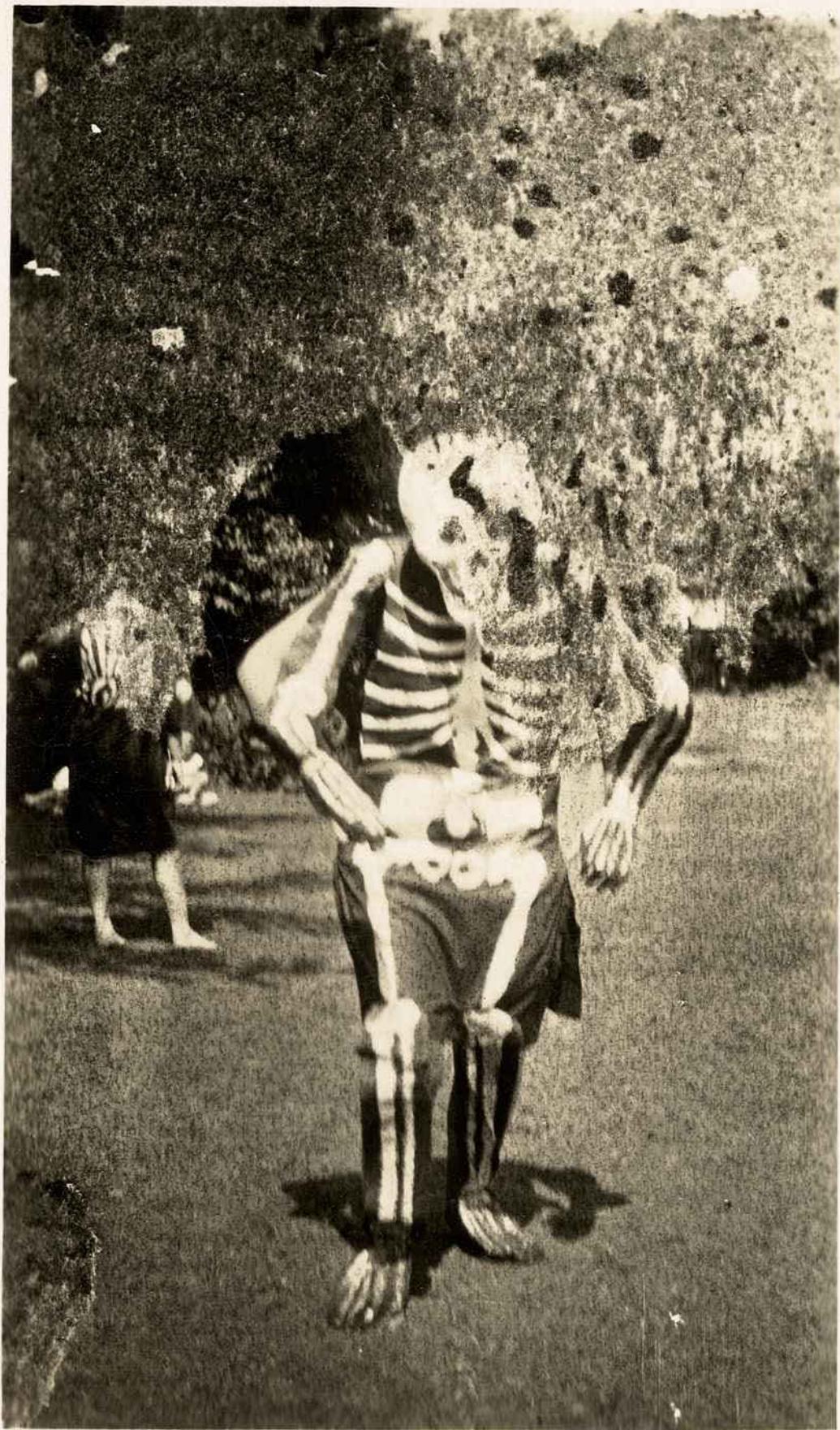


**OSSIAN BROWN** is an artist and musician living on the south coast of England. He is co-founder of the group Cyclobe and previously a member of Coil. His first book *Haunted Air* was published by Jonathan Cape. Brown has exhibited his pictures in the Temple of Hadrian, Rome, and the Pompidou in Paris. Cyclobe made their UK live debut *Albion – Hypnagogue – Ghost* at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 2012.

#### READER OFFER

*Haunted Air* is published by Jonathan Cape (RRP £25.00) **FT** readers can buy copies for the special price of £22.00 including free UK p&p.

To order please call 01206 255 800 and quote the reference 'Fortean Times' (UK readers only)





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# IN SEARCH OF THE HEXHAM HEADS

## PART ONE

In 1977, Paul Sreeton went to the Northumberland town of Hexham to investigate a bizarre case involving stone heads, Celtic scholarship, poltergeist phenomena and werewolves. 40 years on, **STUART FERROL** joined Paul as he retraced his steps. Could the mystery at last be solved?

*FT*'s Dr Dave Clarke has called the case of the Hexham Heads, "a classic in the supernatural field that remains an unsolved mystery to this day," and its continued fame among forteans is testament to this (see *FT*15:4-5, 59:43, 217:74, 220:74 for previous *FT* coverage).

I'm not only a fortean, but also a lifelong resident of Hexham. I grew up just around the corner from where the Heads were discovered. Paul Sreeton had investigated the case back in 1977 and helped popularise the mystery in an article for legendary fortean partwork *The Unexplained* in 1980 and his own *Tales of the Hexham Heads* (Outlaw Press, 1981). When he contacted me to ask if I'd like to get involved with a new book and documentary on the subject, I jumped at the chance.

I first met Paul, documentary filmmaker Graham Williamson and cameraman Oliver Lewis in a Hexham pub on a dreary February afternoon in 2011, where we went over what we knew of the case.

### THE STORY SO FAR...

In February 1972, in the garden of a council house in the market town of Hexham in the north east of England, two young boys called Colin and Leslie Robson dug up two small stone heads. The brothers were excited that they'd found something

THE JOURNAL Friday March 3 1972

### Eerie tale of the two idol heads



Leslie, aged eight, and Colin Robson, aged 11, with the model of a stone head made by Colin before the stone heads were dug up.

Family fear another night of terror

Below: The stone heads which were found in the garden of a council house in Hexham.

Opposite: Paul 'Werewolf' Sreeton holds two heads, one made by Des Craigie (left) and the other by Colin Robson (right), in this 1982 photo.

## TWO YOUNG BOYS DUG UP TWO SMALL STONE HEADS

ancient and wondered where they could take the objects to be examined. They showed the heads to their parents, siblings and next-door neighbours, before deciding to take them to someone at Hexham's famous Abbey who might be able to throw some light on the matter.

Before they could do this, and while the little stone heads were in the house, strange things started to happen. For instance, the heads would be found facing the same way every morning, no matter

what position they'd been left in the night before. Small ornamental bottles were flung across the living room, smashing against the opposite wall. The Robsons' neighbours, the Dodd family, fared no better; in fact, they experienced a night of terror they'd never forget. In the small hours of the morning, as the wind howled outside, one of the boys felt his hair being pulled and, almost immediately afterwards, was startled by the sound of his mother's screams. Mrs Dodd said she'd seen a half-man-half-sheep entity escaping from the house.

The heads finally found themselves in the sanctuary of Hexham Abbey, and from there were sent to the Museum of Antiquities in Newcastle-upon-Tyne for examination. The expert in Celtic artefacts,

# STRANGE EXPERIENCES OF A HEXHAMITE

Part of the land owned by Bogacres Farm was bought by the town to build upon when the old Queen Elizabeth Grammar School was created in 1910. This school eventually became a Middle School, and while my father was the caretaker there we lived directly behind it. Not long after my father took over, the outgoing caretaker told him about a particular corridor in the school that not only always gave him the heebie-jeebies but also made his guard dog freeze on the spot one night, hackles standing on end, and stare at the door at the corridor's end that led out to the yard.

Later, my father would let his dogs, large Newfoundlands, into the school when he locked up at night. Every time he did this one of the dogs would make for the very same door and sit there whining. I still don't know why she behaved like this. She didn't want to go out; if you approached her she wouldn't get up to leave, but just sat there and continued to make panicky, urgent cries. This corridor and door led to where Bogacres farm used to be.

I was amused to hear a watered down version of this tale told by the current occupier of the Dodds' house on Rede Avenue when interviewed for the book and film. I couldn't remember telling many people about it, but it had somehow found its way into local folklore, among other "campfire" tales of grey lady ghosts seen in the school grounds and the haunting of the school by a "pervert" teacher who had hanged himself (there was barely a scrap of evidence for either).

One phenomenon I had experienced at first hand during my time in the area was the sporadically recurring sound, very late at night, of a baby crying, seemingly coming from the middle of the large garden next door. The property was a boarding wing for a special needs school and was unoccupied at the weekends and during school holidays. The crying usually occurred between two and three in the morning, or just afterwards, and spanned most of the two decades we lived there, ruling out any real child. When I read, years later, that some animals can make a sound very similar to a baby's cry I thought it was 'case closed'. But I can't as easily forget the terrifying, otherworldly feeling that would accompany the crying, as well as the complete silence all around that only served to amplify this eerie wailing. And then, to cap it off, Colin Robson mentioned the same auditory anomaly when interviewed and asked about other strange happenings in the area...



STUART FERROL

ABOVE: Head-hunters (l-r) Graham Williamson, Stu Ferrol, Paul Sreeton and Oliver Lewis.

Dr Anne Ross, was then drafted in to examine them at Southampton University. Unaware of the terrifying experiences of the households in Hexham, she unfortunately decided to keep the Heads in her own home. Within days, something began stalking her and her children. This time, the descriptions sounded more like a werewolf.

To add further intrigue to the case, long-term Hexhamite Des Craigie had come forward to claim that he had in fact made the heads for his daughter to play with when he lived at the very same house on Rede Avenue in the 1950s where the Robsons now lived. Craigie claimed there were originally three heads, one broken and discarded long before the famous pair ended up buried under the soil. Dr Ross, at first suspicious of his claim, challenged him to recreate the heads. He did so. The replicas were similar to the originals but lacked some of their visual flair and peculiarities. This was understandable,

perhaps, as over 15 years had passed and Craigie no longer had access to the materials he had used for the Hexham Heads. These, when finally given a petrological examination, seemed to back up Craigie's claim. They were believed to be of modern material. At the time of their construction Des Craigie worked at a company in Hexham that processed and re-used concrete. That, at least from a scientific point of view, seemed to be that.

Despite these findings, there are still a lot of people who doubt Craigie's claim, with clear dividing lines between members of the Robson and Dodd families on the one hand and the Craigies and the academics on the other. The Hexham Heads are now lost. Were they to be found, members of both the Craigie and Robson families would claim ownership.

That's the story we all know. Actually, in the interest of honest reporting, I should say that my early knowledge of the case was fragmentary at best before reading



PAUL SCREETON

ABOVE: 1 and 3 Rede Avenue, the respective homes of the Dodd and Robson families.

about it in Paul Scretton's *FT* article in the 1990s. I knew of the "were-sheep" sighting by Dodd matriarch Nelly. She was a friend and work colleague of my parents, who had had first-hand accounts from her. I had also been told about the hair-pulling, poltergeist-type phenomena that had afflicted not just the Dodd family but also the Robsons next door. But this version of the story had undergone years of Chinese whispers and had mutated almost beyond recognition, no longer even being connected to the little stone heads at all.

We would find this sort of selective amnesia – along with indifference or a kind of amused, pragmatic scepticism – was endemic in the attitude of the people of Hexham toward the case, the exception being the actual families involved in the original phenomena.

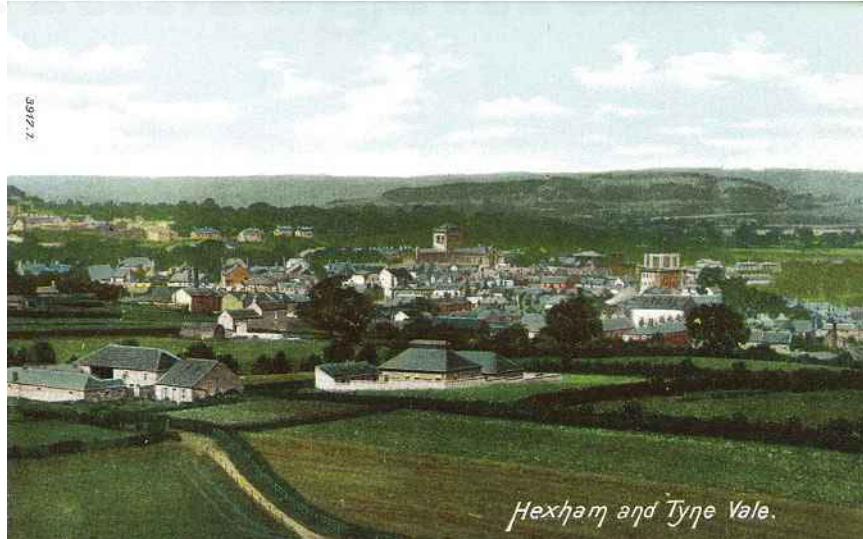
Chinese whispers have also dogged the retelling of the story of the Hexham Heads themselves over the years, and many myths and inconsistencies have been woven into the narrative. A scraping away of these barnacles of untruth was one of the driving forces behind our efforts to re-examine the case. It was to prove far from an easy task.

#### 40 YEARS ON

A major stumbling block to re-examining the case was the sheer number of years that had slipped by since the unearthing of the little stone heads, a period that had sadly claimed the lives of many of the principal witnesses. We would, however, have the pleasure of speaking to witnesses who were children at the time and directly involved, including the victim of the hair-pulling incident, Brian Dodd, and his sister Sylvia, as well as the finder of the heads, Colin Robson. What became apparent very quickly was that although some 'factoids' could be consigned to oblivion, the core facts could be re-established very convincingly by people who vividly remembered the strange events as if they were yesterday.

One untruth that quickly came to light was the date of the discovery. This had previously been thought to be, and cited as, February/March 1972. This made 2012 the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the case, and thus the planned date for both the new book and the documentary. Sadly, it turned out that we'd missed the anniversary by a year. Correspondence in the file on the case opened by the Museum of Antiquities in Newcastle proves that the Hexham Heads were in fact found either late in the first quarter or at the start of the second quarter of 1971.

I had first contacted Paul Scretton a decade ago, after an upsurge of interest in the case amongst the posters on the *Fortean Times* online forums. My physical proximity to "ground zero" had given me an insight into certain aspects of the case which I was surprised had never been reported, and it was my attempts to inform the forum-goers of these little-known facts which led me to get in touch with the author of the first ever



ABOVE: An old postcard showing Hexham from the south. Bogacles farm is on the site of Rede Avenue.

## I KNEW OF THE WERE-SHEEP SIGHTING FROM MY PARENTS

publication about the Hexham Heads.

One of my observations concerned the location of a large slaughterhouse directly opposite the houses on Rede Avenue, where not only had the heads been found but, more importantly, the "half-man-half-sheep" entity had been seen charging from a bedroom. I grew up, from the age of seven, about 200 yards from the town's slaughterhouse, and I'll never forget the omnipresent stench and the baleful cries of animals clearly aware of the approach of death. If it had made such an impression on me, how much more of an impact must it have made, if only subconsciously, on someone who lived directly across the road from it?

Perhaps because I had the simplistically causal mindset of a child, I had always assumed that what Nelly Dodd had seen was some kind of ghostly projection of the slaughterhouse itself – or perhaps the psychic residue of so much death and killing in the name of Sunday Dinner made manifest. It's an idea which, even now, I find intriguing.

At that first pub meeting with Paul and the others I'd brought along a copy of a postcard (reproduced above) of a view of Hexham from the south that clearly showed that the area where the heads were found, now the site of Rede Avenue, had once been a farm called Bogacles. Nothing is recorded about the area before it became a farm. Is the name Bogacles purely a description of the land, or does it have an

older, more obscure derivation? I felt this history of agriculture and animal slaughter might have a bearing on the case, and my own experiences connected to the area (see sidebar) seemed tentatively to back this up.

On old Ordnance Survey maps there appears to be a well next to the barn, which still exists and is now a garage for the haulage firm that uses the buildings. Does this, along with the watery nature of the surrounding area hinted at by its name, suggest an ancient spring that could have been the focus of pre-Roman, or Romano-British (dare I raise the ire of archaeologists and use the unfashionable term Celtic?) worship? Dr Ross allegedly told the Robsons that she believed there could have been some sort of "Celtic" burial ground or shrine at the location, and Colin Robson, the finder of the heads, still believes this.

#### NIGHT OF THE WERE-SHEEP

From the pub, Paul, Graham, Oliver and I made our way to Rede Avenue. This was the first time Paul had been back to the 'scene of the crime' since his original visit in 1977 and he instantly did exactly what he'd done 34 years previously – walked into the garden of the currently tenantless 3 Rede Avenue to see where the Hexham Heads were found. On that day, he had met Colin Robson and his brother Leslie, and he had left Hexham with two 'replica' heads in his possession, one given to him by Colin (more about that next issue) and one of the replicas made by Des Craigie to prove he was the creator of the 'original' heads.

Later in our investigations we were to interview Des's son Nigel Craigie. He brought along the remaining two replica heads made by his late father to be reunited, briefly, with Paul's third.

Nothing dramatic happened – there was no sudden appearance of an animistic entity, and no ensuing poltergeist activity – although we all had difficulty taking a decent photograph of the 'hag' head. My mobile phone also suddenly and prematurely ran out of battery power; but as this has

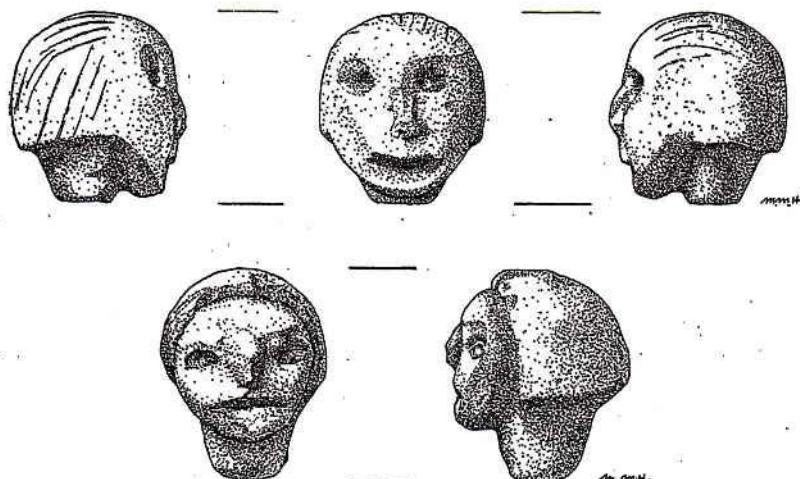


Fig. 5. Stone heads from Hexham

ABOVE: Line drawings of the Hexham Heads made by Mary Hurrell, then Archaeological Illustrator for the Museum of Antiquities. BELOW: Dr Anne Ross appears on TV programme *The Celts*.

continued to happen ever since, it's probably just proof that I have a crap phone.

Back in 1977, Paul had visited Des Craigie at his place of work in Hexham and had ended up back at Craigie's home. After some prompting from his wife, Des had given Paul one of his three replicas. Nigel told us that his father had made these sequel heads in the kitchen sink, much to the annoyance of his wife. These heads were much lighter in hue than the originals, and a little cruder than those he had allegedly crafted in the 1950s, if the beautiful illustrations by Mary Hurrell of the Museum of Antiquities are anything to go by. They were, however, a good weight when held in the palm – something most of the original witnesses said about the Hexham Heads.

Two of those witnesses, next door neighbours Brian Dodd and his sister Sylvia, described to us how they had felt when they'd seen the little stone heads and how they'd found it hard to believe Craigie's claim that they had been made for his infant daughter as playthings – especially due to the aura of sheer malevolence the heads radiated. Brian also gave us, as we interviewed them in his pub, The Sun Inn in Acomb, a detailed and enthralling reconstruction of the terrifying night of the 'were-sheep' visitation.

As Brian's account unfolded it became clear that various oft-repeated details were untrue or inaccurate. The events took place only a matter of days after the Hexham Heads had been found and shown to the Dodds. Nelly Dodd was sleeping in the kids' room because her daughter (not Brian) was suffering from earache (not toothache). It was a windy night with gales buffeting the windows. The Dodds' family dog Pip was howling downstairs, so Brian went to calm it down. He noticed the front door was open and assumed his father had come back late from a night out, although it seemed to be very late, almost certainly early morning.

## SHE DESCRIBED THE 'HAND' THAT TOUCHED HER AS CLAW-LIKE



Brian was terrified, but not sure why. He ran back into his bedroom and dived under the covers, when his hair was pulled, "hard enough to lift my head off the pillow".

That was when his mother screamed. She had woken up when Brian re-entered the bedroom and had seen the silhouette of something she described as "half man, half sheep". It became apparent, though, hearing Brian and Sylvia recount their mother's vivid description, that what she meant was not some kind of classical, Minotaur-like creature, with an animal head and human body, but more of a blend of the two. It appeared at first to be bipedal, but as Mrs Dodd watched it stumble as it tried to leave the room, reaching out to steady itself and touching her leg in the process, it may have shifted to all fours. She

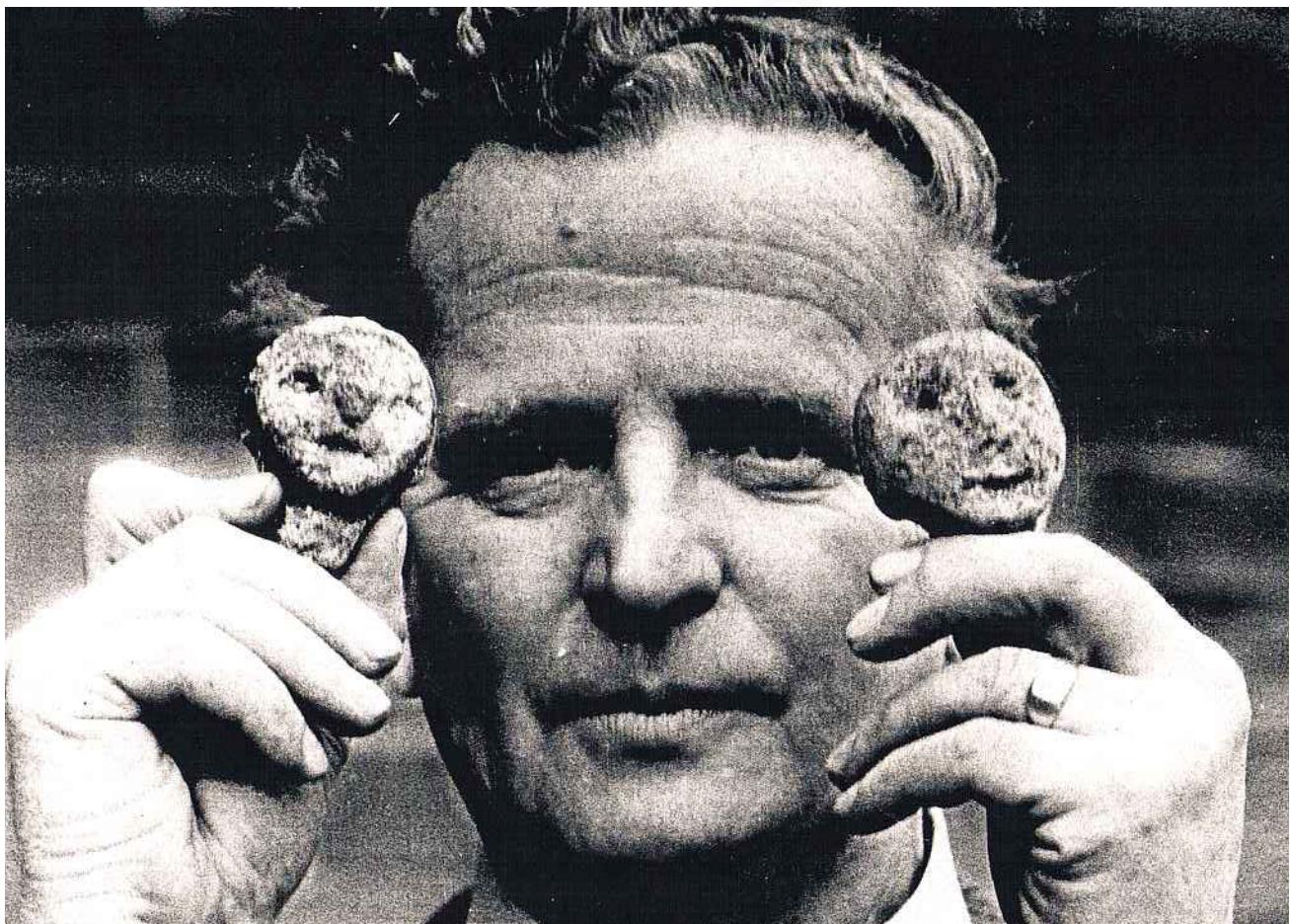
described cloven hoofs, although it is not clear how she could have seen the "feet" from her position on the bed – she did recall the "hand" that touched her leg as being claw-like – but perhaps she deduced this as she heard the entity clip-clop down the stairs and out the open front door.

Nelly Dodd was a practical, no-nonsense, working class Northumbrian woman. Unlike some witnesses of paranormal phenomena who eventually rationalise their experiences away through peer pressure or the desire to maintain a non-threatening consensual reality, she insisted on the truth of what she'd seen to her dying day. She was the only member of the family who saw the thing that night. Her husband had bolted for the small bedroom upon hearing her scream and, according to the supposed departure route of the entity, must have walked *through* it but did not see anything. And despite having his hair pulled violently by some unknown force, Brian did not see his assailant.

One of the strangest witness testimonies (to stretch the term somewhat) came after Paul made a plea for information in local newspaper *The Hexham Courant*. A Mr Barry Scott called him to impart a tale that, he insisted, explained Mrs Dodd's were-sheep sighting. On that very same night someone he knew, the worse for drink, decided to steal a sheep carcass from the slaughterhouse and subsequently made off with it on his back up Rede Avenue. This is what Nelly Dodd must have seen. The sheep-stealer is apparently still with us, now in his 70s, but unlikely to come forward.

I was instantly sceptical of this convenient little tale. I had never heard of any break-ins at the slaughterhouse and remembered how high the wall surrounding it was. I used to sneak onto the waste ground next to it with my friend and we'd dare each other to look over and into the skips below full of stinking, multicoloured offal. It would have been extremely difficult to scale that wall with an entire sheep's corpse on your back, if not impossible. Also, I wondered whether the carcass would have been likely to retain its fleece, head and hooves after slaughter, as it would have to have done to fit Mrs Dodd's description of the entity she encountered.

When we gained access to the Dodds' house at 1 Rede Avenue and looked out of the bedroom window, very little of the road was visible without having to lean right into the window cavity at an angle. Nelly Dodd was in bed when she first saw the were-sheep looming above her. It would have been impossible to see an inebriated local staggering up the road with a sheep on his back from her position. This sounds like a local 'bar room expert' providing a 'conclusive', rational explanation for the mystery from the comfort of his stool. But this need to dampen down the unexplained aspects of the case was notable, even prevalent, amongst the locals; even my parents had comforted themselves with the conclusion that Des Craigie had made the



ABOVE: The provenance of this photograph remains shrouded in mystery; it shows Des Craigie holding up what are possibly the original Hexham Heads.

heads as a prank.

Other rationalists and reductionists may point to the fact that Nelly Dodd had only just awoken when she saw the entity. Having had a disturbed sleep – due to not being in her own bed and the noise of the windy night – she could have awoken as Brian charged back into the room and felt his apparent fear, with her still dreaming mind conjuring up the image of a were-sheep. This doesn't, however, explain Brian's hair being pulled – nor, obviously, does it explain the later entity sightings by Dr Anne Ross and her children in Southampton.

### UNCONSCIOUS IMAGES

This is where, I think, the proximity of the slaughterhouse might be important. Nelly Dodd must have seen, heard and even smelt sheep on a regular basis. And in the case of Dr Anne Ross, the fact that she was a Celtic scholar could be similarly relevant in determining the werewolf identity of the creature she saw: the wolf, or the spectral hound, was a very powerful and recurrent image in Celtic belief.

There's no proof that Dr Anne Ross knew of Nelly Dodd's encounter when she took the Hexham Heads into her home in November 1971. Clippings from local newspapers suggest a slow uptake of the story in the news; many of them date from 1972, which is what may have led to the mistaken belief that this is when the heads were found and the ensuing events took place. Both the

Dodd offspring and Colin Robson recount Dr Ross meeting their respective mothers after the heads had left on their tour of academia, and that she confided in them her own experiences. We all hoped there was some way of validating the Ross family sightings.

Sadly, both Dr Ross's husband Richard Feachem (or Feacham, as he used when writing his 1963 book *A Guide To Prehistoric Scotland*) and daughter Berenice are no longer alive. Anne Ross herself, at the time of our investigations, was suffering from the advanced stages of dementia and no longer remembered her academic career – a tragic fate for a once brilliant leader of her field.

We thought we'd reached a dead end, until her lone surviving offspring, Richard Charles Feachem, appeared on the horizon.

During his interview with Paul, Richard offered his own sighting of the “werewolf” that his mother and sister had famously seen and most of the rest of the family had heard. So, we finally had a corroborating witness to the Southampton sightings to balance the claims from sceptics that they were nothing more than the fantasy of an academic who had been gradually turning to the mystical.

He described the same apparition that his mother had seen standing in her bedroom doorway: a tall, dark, bipedal hybrid of man and wolf, aligned with the traditional, perhaps even Hollywood, version of the werewolf. Again, as in Hexham, this phantasm was not only seen but heard, and in one much-publicised incident the whole

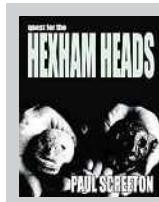
family were eating together when they heard something heavy drop in the hallway – as if something as large as a man had leapt down the stairs, landing on all-fours on the floor. Apart from the few well-known episodes, Dr Ross hinted in correspondence with Paul Devereux (following her appearance on BBC One's *Nationwide* programme in 1976) that there had been many more besides – even after the Hexham Heads were removed from her house. In fact, it was only after *all* her Celtic heads – not just the Hexham examples – were evacuated that the haunting ceased. **FT**

To be continued...

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**STUART FERROL** is a writer, actor/performer and community media company director from north-east England. He has previously written for *FT* on the Hexham Wolf and other topics.



**Quest for the Hexham Heads**  
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# OCTOPUS

"World Cup 2010 was all about the octopus," says Alexandre O Philippe, and the director's new documentary *The Life and Times of Paul the Psychic Octopus*, suggests **BRIAN J ROBB**, is a pop culture parable for our times

Many have tried predicting future events, from the Oracle of Delphi to Criswell, the star of Ed Wood's *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. From the oracles of Greek antiquity to the *I Ching* of China, or the Nechung Oracle of Buddhist lore (still consulted by the Dalai Lama), predicting the future has been fraught with difficulty. Animal oracles have also played their part, notably in Celtic and Druidic lore. However, none in recent times has captured worldwide attention quite like Paul the psychic octopus (FT266:10-11)

If there is one thing people recall about World Cup 2010, it has to be the predictive antics of Paul. According to documentary maker Alexandre O

## PAUL'S DAYS AS A FOOTBALL PUNDIT BEGAN AS A STUNT

Philippe, the man behind *The Life and Times of Paul the Psychic Octopus*, World Cup 2010 was "all about the octopus".

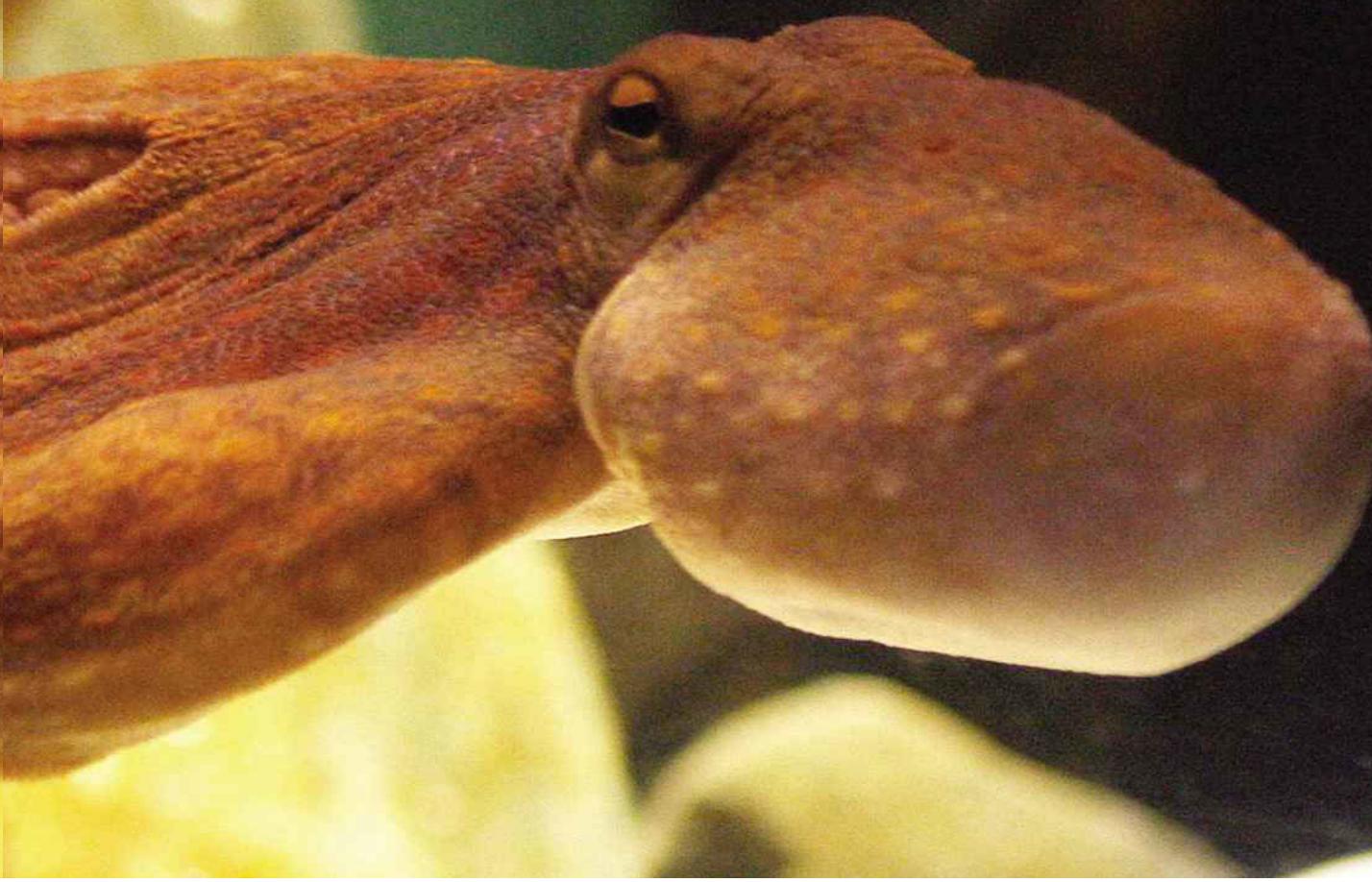
### AN UNASSUMING OCTOPUS

Even those – in fact, especially those

– not interested in football found the story fascinating.

Until worldwide fame found him, Paul was an unassuming member of the species *Octopus vulgaris*, living out his days as a visitor attraction at the Oberhausen Sea Life Centre in Germany. Paul's days as a football pundit began as a publicity stunt by the aquarium: their octopus would pass judgement on each of Germany's upcoming World Cup games. The method was simple. Two transparent boxes – one marked with the German flag, the other with the flag of their opponents – would be placed in Paul's tank. Each box contained mussels, and his choice of which box to feed from would be seen as an indication of the

# ORACLE



PATRIK STOLARZ / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

winning team.

So far, so amusing. Then a strange thing happened. Paul kept picking winners, one after another. The first was Germany against Austria on 13 June. Paul ate from the box with the German colours, and the team won. Experts mocked Paul's second prediction: it was highly unlikely that Serbia would beat Germany on 18 June. However, Paul's pick proved right, drawing the interest of the international media.

Among those captivated by this octopus oracle was documentary filmmaker Alexandre O Philippe. "Like everybody else, I saw on the news every time he got it right. I definitely kept an eye on it, as I thought it was a wonderful, quirky little story. Then, of course, when he predicted the final correctly, that was eight out of eight, and I just couldn't get the story out of my head."

Before the final Paul predicted three more German victories, through to the

quarter-finals at the beginning of July, all under the spotlight of worldwide media attention. That made five out of five correct predictions. The fifth – that Argentina would lose against Germany – resulted in Argentine chef Nicolas Bedorrou posting his favourite octopus recipe on Facebook. The odds were now heavily against this winning streak continuing, yet it did. Paul upset his home supporters by choosing Spain against Germany in the semi-final of 7 July, with death threats made by German fans in the wake of Spain's victory. Spanish Prime Minister, José Zapatero, offered official state protection for Paul.

The final two predictions followed, with Paul redeeming himself in the eyes of German fans by picking their team for victory over Uruguay in the third-place play-off of 10 July. The following day saw the big one, the game that put Paul in the history books. His selection of Spain to win the final of World Cup

2010 against the Netherlands saw him score a complete run of eight correct predictions out of eight attempts.

Paul's short life – octopuses usually live less than two years – is now the subject of a brilliant and engaging pop culture documentary that reveals as much about the quirks of humanity as it does about the predictive abilities of sea life. Philippe had previously tackled the ambivalent relationship die hard *Star Wars* fans have with the movies' creator George Lucas in the blistering *The People vs. George Lucas*. Whether the life story of an octopus was a step up or down in subject matter is moot. "I have to be politically correct here, I can't say it is a step up," laughs Philippe. "It's a fairly similar realm in a way: it's pop culture, it's a topic that a lot of people would look at as being trivial, yet it has a lot of people really passionate. Paul was an amazing thing that happened at one moment in history. I think people still remember Paul very fondly."

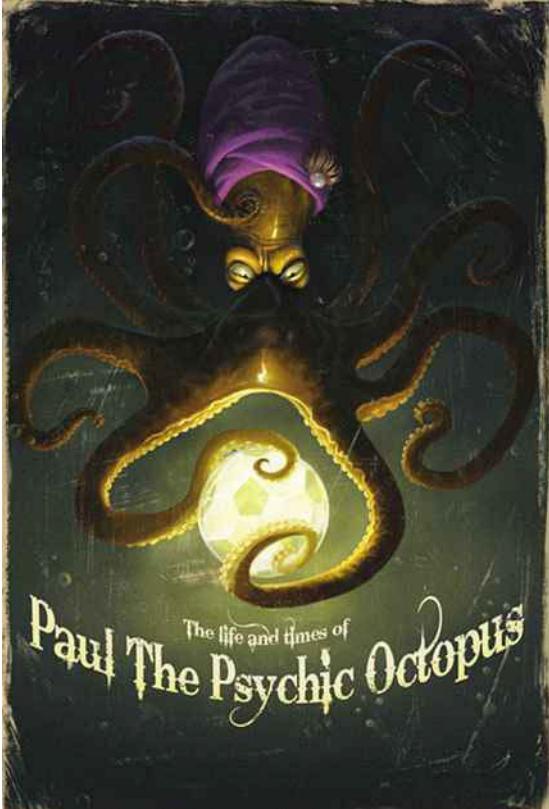
The film takes the subject matter seriously, yet there's an undercurrent of sly humour running through it. "I think that's just my tone," notes Philippe. "On a certain level I take pop culture very seriously, I think it doesn't get its due. My mission in life is to make people look at pop culture through a different lens. This stuff matters, it is a reflection of who we are, of our society. It actually says something about us."

Quite what a world captivated by the antics of a football-predicting octopus says about the human condition is one of the threads of Philippe's film. Another is all-pervasive celebrity culture. "It's ridiculous: if an octopus can become a celebrity, then anyone can. Paul is the perfect embodiment of a story that is at once ridiculous and compelling. It's what happens to YouTubers who shoot to fame because their video goes viral. We look at the octopus and say, 'That's crazy! Well, it's not actually any crazier than the Jedi kid, or any of these crazy animal videos.'

### ORACULAR SPECTACULAR

Paul's endeavours as a football pundit brought him, and his handlers at Oberhausen, worldwide fame. This was a pop culture story that went beyond football and statistics. At a time when the world seemed to be getting ever weirder, Paul the psychic octopus was another indicator of the ever-increasing strangeness of reality in the 21st century.

Even the experts, the football pundits, were out-foxed by the octopus. "I don't



think it necessarily questions the pundits' skills, it just shows how difficult it is," says Philippe of Paul's uncanny accuracy. "The thing that's amazing is the level of unpredictability. Try to toss a coin eight times in a row, and get eight heads or eight tails – good luck! It's going to take you a long, long time to get there. Paul's predictions are a lot more complicated, and this is where the statistics experts

missed the point. If you look at Professor David Spiegelhalter [of Cambridge University] who comes up with this wonderful formula... That's fine, but it doesn't take into consideration the odds of certain teams winning against others. The case in point for me is the second game, Germany versus Serbia: there was no way Serbia was going to win, especially considering how good Germany was... and they did! There was not a single pundit that would have predicted that, but Paul did! The unpredictability of it is remarkable... Then you add the recurrence of the number eight: eight tentacles, eight predictions, the fact that the Spanish team on their way to winning the World Cup scored eight goals... It can't get any more perfect as a story."

Statisticians had a field day with Paul's predictions. Assuming equal odds that Paul could chose the winner or loser of a match (ignoring the individual qualities and histories of the teams involved, as Philippe points out), the octopus had a one-in-two chance of predicting any individual outcome. Across eight sequential matches,

that rose to a one-in-256 chance. It is believed that octopuses are generally colour-blind, so it is not thought that the colours of the individual team flags could have influenced Paul's choices. The food on offer and the boxes containing it were also the same for each team, thus eliminating any bias.

### WARPING THE BELIEF MATRIX

Bigger questions are raised in the film, such as: could the very fact of Paul's predictions alter the reality of the outcome? Philippe believes it may have done so. "That's what I call the *Inception* factor! Did Paul actually affect the outcome of the World Cup? After the fourth correct prediction, the entire world was riveted. There was this focus. It was all about the octopus! If you really think about the feeling of that World Cup, it was all about Paul. Of course, the games mattered for the teams, but all you heard about was Paul! You have to wonder to what extent, going into that final game, were the Spanish helped... even [Spanish player] Joan Capdevila, in the film said this. It has to have had an effect, because that octopus just couldn't be wrong!"

Chance is, of course, a factor in all this, but could there have been some kind of biomimetic feedback resonance system between Paul the psychic octopus and the worldwide population suddenly paying attention to him that somehow combined to affect the outcome of some football matches? What kind of world would it be, if this were true? "Statistics experts clearly think Paul was a fluke," admits Philippe. "They can't wrap their head around any other possibility. The bookmakers believe



TOP: The poster for the new film. TOP: Paul hones his soccer skills in his tank at the Sea Life Centre.



PATRIK STOLLARZ / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Paul opening a box decorated with a Spanish flag on 9 July 2010 before the World Cup final. His prediction was correct; Spain beat the Netherlands 1–0.

that there's more to Paul than meets the eye... It's interesting, because they both live in this world of odds, but they are two completely different worlds. I can totally understand why a bookmaker would think, 'It's not possible [for it to be a fluke]'. Rupert Adams from William Hill says when they get their entire team together they can't correctly predict more than three [outcomes] in a row. These are the experts, people who know the game through and through. That's not even half of what Paul accomplished! To be honest I'm on the fence..."

Philippe, though, has experienced the supernatural himself. "My mom's not a psychic," he says carefully, "she's a doctor by profession, but she has some pretty amazing psychic abilities. There are things that I've experienced with her that make it very hard for me not to believe in the paranormal in some respects. I can't explain, I can't come up with any theories, yet I do believe there is something else out there..."

Perhaps the most entertaining scene in the documentary sees a pair of pet psychics – more formally dubbed 'animal communicators' – attempt to make contact with Paul in the afterlife. "The animal communicators... I think that's the gem, really," laughs Philippe. "We couldn't possibly have dreamed of anything better. We found one in Cambridge and one in Wales. Yeah, they're wonderful, just wonderful characters. The great thing is the whole debate about the origins of Paul: the fact that they contradict each other around that particular theme is so perfect! We will truly never know."

#### PAUL PASSES ON

There would be no further predictions or scientific testing of Paul. He was retired from football punditry immediately after the end of the World Cup. A statement was issued on his behalf: "[Paul] won't give any more oracle predictions – either in football, or in politics, lifestyle or economy. Paul

## PAUL RETIRED FROM PUNDITRY AT THE END OF THE WORLD CUP

will get back to his former job, namely making children laugh." He did perform one final World Cup related duty, though, when he was adopted as the ambassador for England's 2018 World Cup bid... it didn't take a psychic octopus to know that was doomed to failure.

It was believed that Paul had been born in 2008, possibly in a Sea Life Centre in Weymouth, so his predictive successes all came towards the end of his short life. Paul died on 26 October 2010 in his tank in Oberhausen. He was cremated and buried in the grounds, where a shrine was built. The preparations for his celebrity-style funeral provided the starting point for Philippe's film.

"You try to remove yourself from assigning human emotions [to Paul]. As we explain in the film, there's this human-octopus connection, this eye contact thing... I've tried very hard to remove that. However, I've encountered a variety of octopuses in the making of this film and there was something about Paul, truly, that was very different. There was this little sparkle in his eyes. If nothing else, he was definitely a very playful octopus, probably much more so than the others. He was clearly very clever and really curious, always looking at what you were doing. I spent four days with him, exclusively filming him. It's really hard to say: there is still a part of me that wants to believe in the magic of that octopus and what he could potentially have been."

#### WHEN ANIMALS PREDICT!

Paul wasn't the only animal attempting to predict the outcome of the 2010 World Cup. Various creatures at Chemnitz Zoo made a pretty poor showing for the psychic powers of the animal kingdom when they wrongly called every one of Germany's group-stage games, while other animals around the world picked Netherlands as the winner of the final. The one exception was Crocodile Harry of Australia, who backed Paul's choice of Spain.

After Paul's death the Oberhausen Sea Life Centre quickly unveiled Paul II, a French octopus who moved into psychic Paul's tank. The second Paul was supposed to repeat the success of his namesake for the Euro 2012 tournament, alongside a host of other animal pundits, including Yvonne the cow and even elephants and pythons. However, an outcry from animal welfare activists dubbed these events a "craze" and called for the animals to be released from exploitation.

The final word on the life and times of Paul the psychic octopus and his message for humanity must go to Philippe, who bills his documentary as a fairy tale. "It's the ugly ducking story, rags to riches. Starting with the funeral sequence, then tagging it as a fairy tale, it is a way to tell the audience 'You are in for a little ride here, this is not a usual documentary'. It really has these fairy tale elements. Paul's is the perfect underdog story... he probably had no idea what was happening to him, but that's OK. It doesn't matter whether Paul was a psychic or not, because what matters is that people believed in him. What matters is that this is what creates the debate. That's what matters. The truth is not so interesting in the end..." **FT**

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**BRIAN J ROBB** is a regular in a *New York Times* and *Sunday Times* bestselling author and co-editor of the Sci-Fi Bulletin website. He lives in Edinburgh.

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HAVE YOUR SAY

# forum



## George's gay ghosts

If you find gay porn in your neighbourhood, who ya gonna call? Surprisingly, finds SD TUCKER, George Galloway MP...



**SD TUCKER** is a regular contributor to *FT* and the author of the forthcoming books *Paranormal Merseyside* (Amberley 2012) and *Terror of the Tokoloshe* (CFZ 2013).

In May of this year, a sadly somewhat under-reported story made the fringes of the British press. 'Gorgeous' George Galloway, the publicity-hungry Respect Party MP, has made the headlines over the years for any number of reasons, from saluting Saddam Hussein's "indefatigability" and winning by-elections against all odds, to pretending to be a cat and lapping up imaginary milk in front of Rula Lenska on a dignity-sapping reality TV show. Never before, though, had any stories involving him centred upon the alleged occurrence of any supposed paranormal phenomena.

However, strange events were seemingly afoot at Galloway's home in the south London borough of Streatham quite recently. Objects within the three-storey building, also used by Galloway as his personal office, were moving around, apparently of their own accord. Things like ties and shoes were being removed from wardrobes and beneath beds and then placed within different rooms. Galloway's puzzled staff, unable to account for such things, began to whisper that a poltergeist might have been responsible. Galloway himself, though, appears to have had different ideas about the matter.

Being told of the occurrences, Galloway armed himself with a sword which, he said, had been "given to me in Saudi Arabia or somewhere", and marched upstairs hoping to confront whoever or whatever was responsible for the polt-like pranks. In a closet, Galloway was shocked to find two objects which, he said, had not been there before; namely, an empty bottle of gin and a gay porn video, items which, the teetotal and demonstrably heterosexual Galloway pronounced distastefully, "would never be in my house". Probably not believing in



poltergeists, Galloway called out the police. They told him right away that a homeless person was responsible for the 'paranormal' phenomena. They found fingerprints and footprints on a downstairs windowsill, and said that there had been a spate of break-ins perpetrated in the area recently by the homeless. A tramp, they said, had simply been living in his spare room unnoticed for some time, whilst George and his employees had gone about their everyday lives entirely unawares.<sup>1</sup>

A similar thing (or so I was told as a child) once allegedly happened to a friend of my father. He, too, noticed that objects were being moved around and food going missing in his home whilst he was out, and was hearing strange noises during the night. A few times, he had supposedly returned home to see a pale face staring down at him from an upstairs window – only to find, when he had managed to park the car and get inside the house, that there was nobody there. Allegedly, the man suspected a ghost was at work. Eventually, though, the householder managed to work out that there was no spirit in the home at all but, rather, a homeless man who had been living in his attic. I had presumed in adulthood that this story was just

implausible nonsense; but reading about Galloway's recent problems has made me feel less sure ...

However, both cases throw light upon what might be termed one of the 'imaginative functions' of ghosts (or putative ghosts, at least), particularly poltergeists; namely, they can very easily be invoked by us in order to fill in what could be called 'gaps in causality'. If you misplace your wallet and say that "a spook did it", then you may only mean this half-seriously. Maybe Galloway's employees, too, were simply joking about poltergeists; or, then again, maybe not.

In the 1980s, Julian Isaacs, a member of the Society for Psychical Research, was performing 'metal-bending' experiments with volunteers. These experiments seemingly had side-effects, however; some volunteers found that, after participating, small objects had been going missing from their usual places in their homes before later turning up again in an entirely different place some days later. Sceptics would, of course, blame mere absent-mindedness for these events. They happen to everyone at some point, and are usually dismissed as being "just one of those things". Isaacs, though, felt that they might not be, and the SPR has since set up something called 'Operation JOTT' (Just One of Those Things) in order to investigate the phenomenon more thoroughly.<sup>2</sup>

On their website today, the SPR are still looking for examples of such things, which they have termed 'jottles'. But why? Surely endless tales of people losing their glasses and then finding them in the fish-tank are inconsequential at best, at worst immensely tedious? Not according to the SPR. Jottles, they say, "may look trivial, but a small hole in a large balloon can cause a total collapse, and a discontinuity in the fabric of the environment may lead us to radical ideas about the nature of reality."<sup>3</sup> This is, of course, true; if even one of these incidents turns out to have been down to a poltergeist, teleportation, or something else equally 'damned' in nature, then it is obviously of great importance. The trouble is, extreme cases aside, how do we tell the difference between genuine accounts of jottles, and cases like George Galloway's? We fill in the causal gaps, I think, however we wish to. **FT**

### NOTES

1. *Daily Mail*, 2 May 2012

2. Anon, *Marvels & Mysteries: Strange Talents*, Parallel Publishing, 1995, pp94-95

3. <http://www.spr.ac.uk/expcms/index.php?section=74>

# Science, spooks and sceptics

Is ghost hunting a fashionable fad or a serious search for truth? JOHN FRASER has a few suggestions as to how today's new breed of ghost hunters can improve their standing with sceptical critics.

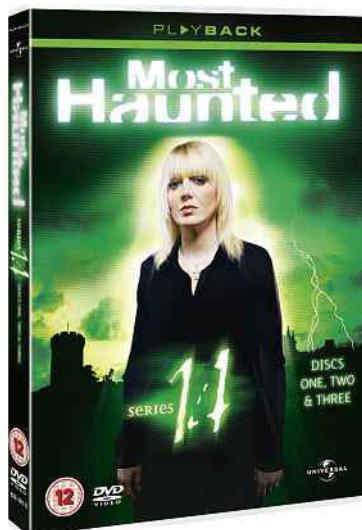


**JOHN FRASER** is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent, long-time *FT* contributor and author of many books; He welcomes responses at [jfraserghosthunting@hotmail.com](mailto:jfraserghosthunting@hotmail.com).

**S**ome colleagues of mine in the Society for Psychical Research estimated in a recent paper<sup>1</sup> that since the new millennium, and partly due to the flood of 'Ghost Hunting' television shows such as *Most Haunted*, there were now over 1,200 groups involved in ghost hunting – 12 times the number that existed in the 1990s (and, some would claim, offering 12 times the opportunity for bad research).

Like it or not, a combination of television and the Internet has caused ghost hunting to change from a minority hobby to something that a large section of the population is now curious to try. With the increase in participation there has been a complete change in ghost hunters' ambitions as well. A new breed of 'technology buffs' has emerged, giving the impression that ghosts might soon be scientifically proven to exist; the traditional camera and tape recorder have been supplemented by EMF (electromagnetic field) meters, Ion detectors and, occasionally, even Geiger counters (when one of these registers it's time to vacate any haunted house, ghost or no ghost!).

Using scientific equipment, however, does not make a new science. The theory that a high EMF somehow reveals the presence of a ghost is simply one of many speculative hypotheses that have grown up over the years. The writer and researcher TC Lethbridge, on the other hand, claimed that ghosts were energy forces created by water. Colin Wilson in his book *Poltergeist!*, after investigating 'The Black Monk of Pontefract' case (see **FT293:28-37**), transferred his original support for a psychokinesis-based theory to one that spirits and elementals might somehow use the hidden energies of people. He summed this up by saying that: "It is just conceivable that Diane [the poltergeist's victim] unconscious mind might throw her out of bed... but by no stretch of the imagination can I



## Ghost hunting is no longer a minority hobby

imagine it grabbing her by the throat and dragging her up the stairs."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, there is the well-known Stone Tape theory of ghosts, in which certain traumatic events are somehow stored in the fabric of a building, nicely fitting the anecdotal evidence of some ghosts' repetitive behaviour.

To say that there is a different theory for every investigator would be to exaggerate, but surely all this confusion and lack of agreement simply gives ammunition to accusations from sceptics that ghost hunting is little more than a delusional parlour game? Possibly so; but perhaps both the sceptics and the more open-minded investigators have been trying to raise the bar rather too high.

Here are two statements that I hope those genuinely interested in research will find self evidently true.

1) A ghost hunter should not know for sure if what he is searching for (in a paranormal sense) actually exists.

**LEFT:** Popular television shows like *Most Haunted* have raised the profile of ghost hunting as a hobby.

2) If ghosts do exist, we still have no real idea of what they may actually be.

Once we have accepted these two simple propositions, and therefore stopped pretending we are scientists (yet), it is possible to remain open-minded about all forms of research in which investigators are cautious and rational in interpreting their results.

At a conference I attended some months ago, one or two sceptical speakers ridiculed ghost hunters who employ 'traditional' methods of investigation. This helped, in a strange way, to clarify my own thoughts on the subject and to question why people who test the validity of Ouija boards and mediums, or who place 'trigger objects' in the hope that an 'intelligent' ghost will move them, should be any more open to ridicule than people who use an EMF meter. This is, after all, a device that simply picks up a phenomenon we already know to exist and which has never in any way been shown to constitute the 'building blocks' of a ghost.

A few years ago I ran a survey with paranormal research groups about the use of various investigative techniques.<sup>3</sup> One respondent stated that:

"Mankind currently possesses no handheld or portable instruments that are currently capable of measuring energy fluctuations at quantum physics level and until it does we are forced to rely on psychic mediums who do appear to have limited access to [these] natural systems."

Now, whether we agree or disagree with his statement it is an hypothesis that at the very least justifies the use of mediums under suitably controlled circumstances.

Likewise, if a coherent message is picked up by a Ouija board and contains information that the users were unlikely to possess, this would be potential (not conclusive) evidence for either an intelligent spirit or ESP. If, as often happens, only incoherent or contradictory information is gleaned, then (assuming ghosts are not incoherent) this provides valuable ammunition for the sceptical theory that the participants' collective

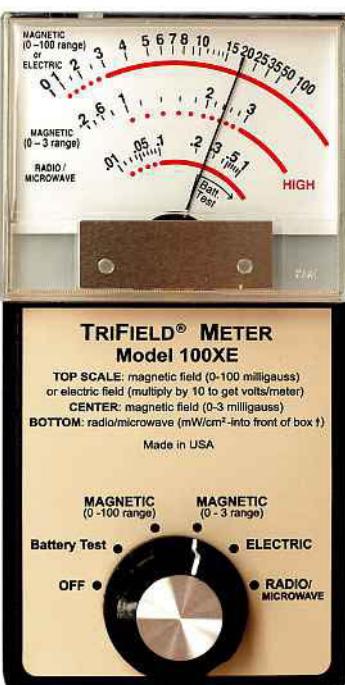
subconscious impulses may actually be making the glass move through accidental pressure from their fingers. In either case, no one willing to put his or her own theories or beliefs to the test should be scared off by a simple experiment using an upturned glass on a flat piece of wood. Likewise, a small trigger object is not necessarily 'unscientific', although for the experiment to be meaningful there have to be some basic scientific controls; for instance, putting the object on a solid surface in a locked room, or training a video camera on it.

A state of questioning scepticism can be an advantageous one with which to investigate the unknown. When a paranormal and natural explanation both fit, it is the natural one that should take precedence on most occasions. Some ghost hunters do, indeed, need reminding of this; but what disappoints me about the sceptics is the extent to which many of them have detached themselves from the mainstream 'paranormal' debate and now simply talk to each other. This ultimately prevents a full exchange of talents and ideas.

As I have already said, I can see no way in which ghost hunters can currently call themselves scientists. Even the best run ghost hunt will not get itself into a mainstream scientific magazine. Any investigators who think their 'authentic' photo or recording will prove that ghosts exist are merely deluding themselves. Does this invalidate what is often an expensive hobby for many investigation teams?

Personally, I see nothing wrong with simply observing, reporting and researching without reaching any definite conclusions about the particular case, other than simply stating that there appears, on the surface, to be no rational explanation. Sooner or later, if enough of these well-researched cases are on record, then scientific bodies will be more likely to become involved in looking at them.

It hasn't, after all, just been ghost-hunting groups that have seen such recent growth. In 1985, the first university-based parapsychology unit in Britain was set up at Edinburgh University (funded by a grant from the estate of the writer Arthur Koestler; see *FT*201:32-39;224:58-59). Today, eight university groups are working in this field. One might argue that they have been a little too insular, keeping their studies and experiments within their own departments, but I would hope it's only a matter of time before they are more willing to explore apparent



spontaneous paranormal events such as ghosts and poltergeists.

It's unlikely that any single ghost-hunting team should be able to absolutely confirm the authenticity of a good, active case. What they can do, however, is to test their own belief systems through open-minded but rational experimentation, and to record data in such a way as to label it as simply 'explained' or 'without a current explanation'. Such a level-headed approach might even tempt more field research from universities

and better resourced institutions.

It's also important to recognise that – in spite of the television programmes – ghost hunting is not just about spending the night in a reputedly haunted place with lots of hi-tech equipment. It's also about patiently recording witness testimony, looking for both patterns and inconsistencies within it, and – first and foremost – seeking a rational explanation for events.

Ghost hunters can fulfil other useful functions, too. In cases where householders are worried or scared, a ghost hunter can sometimes provide a bit of reassurance. One of my most satisfying cases was helping obtain a transfer for a council house tenant, a single mother who felt forced to vacate her new flat in the genuine belief that an entity was stalking her there.

Anomalies and unexplained events have been reported as far back as Roman times, when Pliny the Younger wrote about a haunted house in Athens. So, despite its current TV-led resurgence, ghost hunting is not a recent fad, but a venerable occupation. While ghost hunting as a 'search for truth' is unlikely to yield up a comprehensive answer to any one group – and is as likely to involve folklore and local history as the supernatural – it's undoubtedly a fascinating and constructive way to spend one's time, and one that will continue to fascinate investigators of all kinds for many years to come. **FT**

# Death Tripping

**SOPHIE COLLARD** takes a cheap holiday in other peoples' misery as she visits the Institute for Dark Tourism Research



**SOPHIE COLLARD** writes for publications and websites in the travel industry much of the time and about trains at [sophieontrack.com](http://sophieontrack.com). She's also responsible for [www.willgather.co.uk](http://www.willgather.co.uk).

**M**any of us will slow down when driving past a car crash. Usually, we feel guilty for doing so, catch ourselves and move on. Yet we've all walked through graveyards – and not usually to visit dead relatives. Often, it's out of a fascination with the lives of others – or, more particularly, their deaths. Especially if they were the result of something nasty. Think of all those plague pits dotted about the UK. Fascinating.

Père Lachaise in Paris is perhaps the most visited cemetery in the world (see **FT222:78-79**). Hundreds of thousands of tourists pass through its gates each year on their way to the pink-lipstick-covered monument to Oscar Wilde or Jim Morrison's final resting place.

Cemetery walking is perhaps one of the most commonly enjoyed forms of what is known as Dark Tourism, or thanatourism, a specific form of tourism associated with death or tragedy. People have been Dark Tourists for thousands of years. Flocking to watch gladiators in ancient Rome, visiting the Paris morgue on 19<sup>th</sup> century city tours, or attending public executions in the UK from the Middle Ages to the 1860s. In terms of the more 'acceptable' forms of Dark Tourism, Thomas Cook was organising battlefield tours from 1919, just a year after the Great War ended.

There are degrees of darkness. Visiting graveyards isn't considered all that strange. And what about the shrunken heads in Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum? Tell someone you're going there and that will most likely be the exhibit they mention. Places such as Anne Frank's House, Auschwitz, Ground Zero and Titanic Belfast are all high on the thanatourism hotspot list. Each gets more than a million visitors a year. But these sites are also seen as important for education, remembrance and often reconciliation.

The University of Central Lancashire



recently launched an Institute for Dark Tourism Research (iDTR). The iDTR aims to better understand why people want to visit places associated with death and tragedy, as well as studying the positive effects – such as the economic benefits – of this kind of tourism.

When I went to meet the Associate Director of iDTR, Professor Richard Sharpley, to find out more about the institute, he told me that he wasn't interested in death as a fascination, but death as a context. His main role is Professor of Tourism and Development at the university. Aside from the iDTR, he runs a module on Dark Tourism for undergraduates that can be taken as part of their Tourism and Development degree.

"We want to research the links between Dark Tourism and development. Then we can better understand how Dark Tourism is translated into something socially

**ABOVE:** The grave of Doors frontman Jim Morrison attracts countless fans, mourners and dark tourists every year.

and economically beneficial," he says. "The institute aims to provide a focus for people to unpick this thing called Dark Tourism – part of this is naming things that could be considered dark. We're still at the beginning so it's mostly theorising, but we want to know if it's possible to categorise – can we say 'grave tourism' or 'genocide tourism' for example?"

Looking at the websites for some of the Dark Tourism hotspots, the social benefits are obvious – all of these places have educational programmes and help to organise school visits. They enable children to learn about what happened in the past, about the mistakes that were made and the effect those mistakes had. The Anne Frank House relies on visits for 95 per cent of its funding, which goes toward maintaining the museum and paying its staff as well as the "development of educational projects and activities at home and abroad... conducting research in the field of racism and extremism." At Auschwitz, 48 per cent of the museum's income goes towards the preservation of the site and education. Titanic Belfast will eventually be owned by Titanic Foundation Limited, "whose primary objective is to educate people about Belfast's maritime and industrial heritage." The National September 11<sup>th</sup> Memorial & Museum's mission is to "bear solemn witness to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993." It too offers educational material and support.

While there are many places that benefit learning and put money into the economy, there is also a side to Dark Tourism that is undeniably voyeuristic... the side that makes us want to watch public executions or stare at dead bodies. As Professor Sharpley says, what we should think of as 'dark' is not the destinations themselves, but rather the behaviour of the tourists that visit them.

"The year after 9/11, twice as many people visited Ground Zero as had visited the Twin Towers the previous year," he tells me. "While that could be considered as a movement of solidarity and of mourning and remembrance, at the same time, there was a farmer who was charging to take people to the Flight 93 crash site. The behaviour of the Ground Zero tourists wouldn't be considered dark by many people, whereas the behaviour of the crash site tourists and of the farmer himself might well be thought of as dark by a lot of people."

He gives another example: "There were buses of tourists that went to

Soham after the murder of 10-year-old girls Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in 2002. 10,000 tourists turned up in the 10 days that followed."

This sends a shiver up my spine. Someone I know knew the brother of one of the girls, and I find the idea of anyone wanting to go there deeply disturbing. Sharpley wonders whether they perhaps "went to show a sense of solidarity with the residents of Soham, or to grieve for their own losses. Whatever the reasons people went, the vicar asked them to leave the town to grieve."

I almost wish he hadn't told me about that, and when he mentions Dunblane, I don't want to hear about the numbers that turned up. I find it too upsetting. More recently, he tells me, tourists have been to Perugia to visit the house where Meredith Kercher was murdered.

One of Professor Sharpley's biggest areas of research is Rwanda. I have to ask myself, at this point, why the idea of Soham and Dunblane tourists hits such a nerve with me, while I struggle to connect with the Rwandan genocide, where so many children perished in the '100 days of death.' Perhaps it's the nature of the event, the sheer scale of the tragedy. Perhaps it's easier to hate a single monster than to think through the complexities of political upheaval and mass murder. Perhaps it's just about personal connection.

In the case of Rwanda, though, tourists are giving something back and contributing to the economy. "Reading genocide studies about Rwanda, one commentator said that people must be ghouls to go there. But most people go there for the gorillas," Sharpley tells me.

"I looked at about 50 travel blog posts on Rwanda, and about 45 were quite lengthy, emotionally written pieces. What it showed was that people were not going as ghouls. They wanted to see how people could turn on each other, rather than to gawp at the bodies of women and children preserved in lime, the schoolbooks in trunks and the bloodied clothes. They were shocked by the gruesome displays and were unable to see the perpetrators as human beings. What made it emotive was seeing the photographs of the children. That personalises it. People walked back into contemporary Rwanda afterwards, where anyone over 16 had been there at the time... and somehow these tourists came out with tremendous hope."

In Anne Frank's House there is a Primo Levi quote on the wall which reads: "One single Anne Frank moves us more than countless others... if we



MICHAEL REGAN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

## Visiting grave-yards isn't considered that strange

were capable of taking in all the suffering of all those people, we would not be able to live."

When standing in the killing fields in Cambodia, the clothes and bone fragments rooted in the ground are indeed emotive, but it's visiting the museum, with its rows upon rows of black and white photographs of the victims, that really connects visitors to the story of what happened. And such a sense of connection can have important economic effects. Whenever a disaster in a foreign country is reported in the UK, the first thing the news report will tell us is if any Britons died in the tragedy. It allows for national and personal identification. This was certainly the case in Thailand following the 2006 tsunami, when many tourists perished and donations came in thick and fast from all around the world. Not long after the disaster in Thailand there was a huge earthquake in Pakistan. The international response was comparatively tiny. Not many tourists had died there.

Dark Tourism sites also get validation and increases in visitor

ABOVE: Did the English football team's visit to Auschwitz encourage others to visit the site and ponder history's darker side?

numbers via the media. The 1997 film *Titanic* ignited a huge interest in the doomed vessel which has had an incalculable knock-on effect with regard to increased interest in Titanic Belfast. More recently, the England Football team paid a visit to Auschwitz while in Poland for Euro 2012; the trip made headline news and no doubt encouraged many football fans who might not otherwise have gone to the camp to pay a visit.

The films *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Killing Fields* have perhaps done something similar. You might come to Rwanda for the gorillas, or Cambodia for the temples of Angkor, but these days visitors believe it is 'respectful' not to ignore the violent pasts of these countries.

"I see tourism as a lens through which we can view and understand people, for exploring things that are important in our lives, and Dark Tourism is a part of that. It's about what it symbolises," Professor Sharpley says.

Perhaps it isn't just that people want to learn about the mistakes, contemplate the disasters and mourn the tragic deaths of all these people, so much as offer to help heal the wounds. In the cases of Rwanda and Cambodia, many tourists don't want to go without giving something back. They believe that just by standing in the places where such atrocities happened they help demonstrate that what did happen is not acceptable. Above all, people want to hold the hands of those affected and tell them everything is going to be all right. ■

Further reading:  
Richard Sharpley and Philip Stone, *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, Channel View Publications Ltd, 2009

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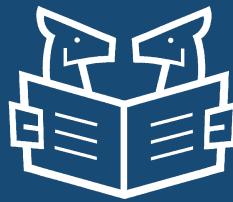
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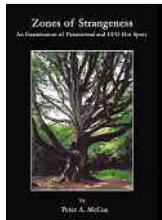
This month's books, films and games

# reviews



## Some like it hot, others don't

There is no overall theory of psychic hot spots, but this solid guide to the theories about them and other psi phenomena lays the groundwork for further study



### Zones of Strangeness

An Examination of Paranormal and UFO Hot Spots

Peter A McCue

AuthorHouse 2012  
Pb, 560pp, bib, notes, ind, £18.95, ISBN 9781456778422

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.95

As *FT* regularly bears witness, there is no shortage of mysteries and strange phenomena in the world. The problem is to make theoretical sense of them.

One notion is that there are certain spots which are particularly prone to anomalous phenomena. In *The Romeo Error* (1975), biologist Lyall Watson wrote: "Periodically, all hell breaks loose in one of these places and poltergeists start flinging things around, apparitions and unidentified people appear, people and sometimes vehicles unaccountably disappear, mysterious fires break out and there may even be hysteria or a form of mass madness." Such places have been dubbed "window areas" or "psychic hot spots". Peter McCue's book *Zones of Strangeness: An Examination of Paranormal and UFO Hot Spots* is a detailed examination of claims surrounding such locations and the complex and intangible phenomena associated with them.

Ideas over hot spots range from those of occultists who see these areas as portals to other

dimensions, to the outright dismissals of rigid materialists, who see the whole subject as stuff and nonsense. Falling within these two extremes are all manner of scientific and pseudo-scientific opinions and beliefs, with theorists postulating everything from psi-powers to geophysics to sociology to account for weird phenomena. Completing the picture are those maintaining such zones are illusory and the product of statistical freaks arising from the reporting of data.

McCue recognises that the notion of such areas has an emotional appeal, but approaches them from a background as a clinical psychologist and informed by the literature of parapsychology. Consequently, one of the strengths of this book is the author's familiarity with the competing ideas and theories advanced regarding the accumulated data. He has studied widely and informs us of the books he hasn't read. McCue is one of the few authors in this field you will find citing GNM Tyrrell, the 20th century's leading theorist on apparitions.

It is a strength of this book that it functions as a guide to theories about hot spots and psi phenomena, as much to the actual locations themselves. Introductory chapters are provided on both ghosts and UFOs, though I question whether the almost exclusively North American phenomena of Bigfoot merits a chapter to itself when the majority of the areas covered are in the UK. A chapter on Alien Big Cats would perhaps have been preferable for British-based readers. But when McCue comes to examine alleged hot spots in detail, this book comes into its

**"labelling a place as a hot spot attracts people with a predisposition to psychic beliefs"**

own. If you are keen to examine the areas in detail, McCue has done the groundwork for you.

Once he completes his critical assessments for each area, the very model of hot spots rapidly starts to dissolve, with his enquiries indicating many are now regrettably inactive at best. In England, he covers Clapham Wood in West Sussex, Warminster in Wiltshire, Rendlesham Forest in Suffolk and Cannock Chase in Staffordshire. He examines the alleged 'Welsh Triangle' around Milford Haven. In Scotland, he covers Bonnybridge, Ben Macdui and the Loch Aishie region. He reviews Skinwalker Ranch in Utah, sites in Puerto Rico, the Bermuda Triangle, the Nullabor Plain in Australia and Hoia-Baciu Wood in Romania, finding that the further one goes from the UK, the more astonishing the claims and the more difficult they are to corroborate.

Undoubtedly, labelling a place as a window area or hot spot attracts people with a predisposition to psychic beliefs, leading to paranormal interpretations of mundane experiences. Thus, a camera failure on Lewisham High Street would be immediately forgotten but occurring in the depths of Clapham Wood it would take on a grave significance.

Having found so many claims

wanting, McCue could easily have signed off with his book constituting another debunking exercise. However, the fortean merit of this book is that as well as querying many claims, the author also questions the sceptical explanations. For example, it has been surmised that the high number of UFO reports around Bonnybridge is a media generated artefact, with the press encouraging sightings to be reported. For this to be the case, it would be necessary to assume that sightings are also occurring in equal numbers in other areas in the UK but simply not being reported. There is no evidence for this.

Furthermore, McCue recognises that a significant number of anomalous experiences do not yield readily to explanation and that some particular areas seem to generate proportionally more accounts of strange goings-on. One of these is the area around Loch Aishie, where the author has turned up intriguing claims of a recurrent phantom battle.

Thus, an overall theory for hot spots still eludes, although the author is pessimistic about the prospects of finding conclusive answers in his relatively short concluding section. *Zones of Strangeness* is rounded off with an extensive set of endnotes and a bibliography which make up for gaps in the index. Peter McCue has amply demonstrated the scale of the challenge posed in making sense of hot spots, and has provided future researchers with a valuable resource.

Alan Murdie

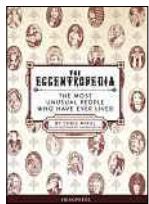
### Forétean Times Verdict

EXCELLENT RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE  
INTEREST IN PSI PHENOMENA

8

# Mad, bad, dangerous

A splendid cast of oddballs, from the gently peculiar to the unpleasantly deranged, make perfect fortean bedside reading



## The Eccentropedia

**The Most Unusual People Who Have Ever Lived**

Chris Mikul

Headpress 2012

Pb, 525pp, illus, bib, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781900486828

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £15.29

The word 'eccentric' first gained currency around the time of the French Revolution, when eccentricity was considered a particularly English characteristic. Anthologies of eccentric lives began appearing, such as James Caulfield's *Portraits, Memoirs and Characters of Remarkable Persons* (1813) and GH Wilson's *Wonderful Characters* (1821). These early works included physical freaks, such as Mary Davis, the horned lady, and famous criminals like Mary Frith, 'Moll Cutpurse'.

As the 19th century progressed, 'eccentric' came to imply a person lacking in malice or *intentional* oddity, so that those setting out to be eccentric would not succeed. Most eccentrics would deny that they were eccentric, which was an obstacle for neuroscientist David Weeks, seeking subjects for his psychological survey of eccentrics, but he managed to find and interview over a thousand. In *Eccentrics* (1995), co-written with Jamie James, he found that the top five characteristics shared by his subjects were nonconformity, creativity, curiosity, idealism, and obsession with one or (usually) more hobbyhorses. Chris Mikul, editor of the magazine *Bizarriism*, divides eccentrics into contrarians who don't give a fig for convention, such as Dr William Price, the Archdruid of Wales; theorists who crave followers, such

as hollow-earth advocate Cyrus Teed; visionaries, like Blake; and entertainers (Liberace, for example).

Of course, England doesn't have a monopoly of eccentrics, but we have perhaps memorialised them more than other nations. *The Eccentropedia*, with its potted lives of 223 men and 43 women, includes the more memorable misers, hermits, obsessive tunnellers, bibliomaniacs, exhibitionists and dotty clerics from the 19th century compendia, and is a natural companion to two other biographical dictionaries of recent years: *The Emperor of The United States of America & Other Magnificent British Eccentrics* by Catherine Caulfield (1981) and Brewer's *Rogues, Villains & Eccentrics* by William Donaldson (2002). Some overlap is inevitable, but there are many characters here unknown to me, for instance the street characters of Sydney, Mikul's home turf. "As a boy," he writes, "I watched Joseph Cindric push his trolley through the streets, and wondered like many others where he had come from and where he was going. I listened as Owen Lloyd, the 'Birdman of King's Cross', played his fiddle with multi-coloured birds perched on his bow. I was fascinated to read the stories of earlier eccentrics who had graced the city, like the toga-clad Chidley, the Shakespeare-spouting Bea Miles, the 'witch' Rosaleen Norton, and Arthur Stace, who is estimated to have written the word 'Eternity' on its streets over half a million times."

Mikul has included many characters profiled in *Fortean Times*, such as Joseph Stawinoga, "The Ring Road Tramp"; airport dweller Alfred Merhan; thronemaker James Hampton; military hermit Hiroo Onoda; rocket scientist Jack Parsons; Jasmuheen, advocate of living on light rather than food; Oberto Airaudi, founder of Damanhur; Charles K

Johnson, Flat Earth champion; Tiffany Thayer, founder of the Fortean Society; and, naturally enough, Charles Fort.

Then there are inspired builders like Edward Leedskalnin, creator of Florida's mysterious coral castle; Ferdinand Cheval, the French postman who built a palace; Nek Chand, who created the rock garden of Chandigarh; and Sam Rodia, who constructed the Watts Towers. There are useful condensed biographies of familiar cultic pioneers such as Blavatsky, Crowley, Gurdjieff, Reich, Raël (Claude Vorilhon), George King and Richard Shaver; hilariously terrible performers like the Cherry Sisters, 'Romeo' Coates, and Florence Foster Jenkins; dodgy fantasists like Edmund Backhouse; artists like Darger, Gaudi, Lenkiewicz, and Warhol; and pop culture characters such as Captain Beefheart, Moondog, Sun Ra, Screaming Lord Sutch, and Viv Stanshall. And we have folk who just had to be included – like Diogenes, Ludwig II of Bavaria, Howard Hughes, Frederick Rolfe (Baron Corvo), Quentin Crisp, Harold Davidson (the Rector of Stiffkey) Bobby Fischer, Orde Wingate and Victoria Woodhull.

The real joy of a book like this, however, comes from discovering unfamiliar oddballs. Take Stephen Pearl Andrews, author of *The Primary Synopsis of Universology* (1871), who invented a "single grand planetary language" called Alwato, based on the idea that all sounds used in speech have inherent meanings that had been forgotten. The Alwato dictionary was published by his sons after his death. Mikul concludes: "Like many of Andrews' undoubtedly well-meaning but deeply obscure ideas, [it] was greeted with universal indifference."

Paul Sieveking

## Digital Rapture

**The Singularity Anthology**

Eds: James Patrick Kelly & John Kessel

Tachyon Publications 2012

Pb, 432pp, notes, \$15.95/£13.50, ISBN 9781616960704

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.15



We cannot know when or if or how the Singularity will come upon us. But this doesn't mean a sudden propulsion into mysterious superhumanity – be it of four-digit IQs, unforeseen biological alterations or journeys into cyberspace – isn't worth a ponder. The unknowability of what the Singularity is/will be fuels the 18 short stories and essays forming *Digital Rapture*. Skilfully edited and introduced by James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel, this far-reaching collection tours all aspects of the technological Omega point, raising highest philosophical, ethical and religious issues with writings that are by turns hysterical, terrifying, profound and bizarre. The names are impressive: Asimov, Kurzweil, Frederik Pol, Bruce Sterling, Robert Reed, Cory Doctorow and Benjamin Rosenbaum are among the contributors. Included too, of course, is Vernor Vinge's seminal essay, 'The Coming Technological Singularity', written in 1993 and still going strong. But what also impresses is the editors' coherent arrangement of dazzling speculative essays and sci-fi at its weirdest. Taken together, the collection offers numerous paths to the peak of human transcendence and asks questions that may be more important than we can now fathom.

With selection spanning nearly a century – from Rudy Rucker and Eileen Gunn's 2012 short story 'Hive Mind Man' to an excerpt from JD Bernal's 1929 essay 'The World, The Flesh and The Devil' – the editors affirm that, although Singularity-influenced sci-fi possesses futuristic technological concerns, its transcendent impulse is thoroughly ancient. In the introduction they write: "Those early Transhumanists, the medieval Christian ascetics, likewise believed our bodies were mere platforms." The Singularity, greeted by some authors with a

## Fortean Times Verdict

A FANTASTIC REMINDER OF THE VARIETY OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

9

sense of eagerness, by others with a feeling of dread, is evolution beyond the boundaries of what's human. But to what benefit and at what cost?

To explore this question the book is arranged into four sections. In the first, The End of The Human Era, are "Singularity precursor stories" raising issues related to human/technological interplay that range from Asimov's "self-adjusting and self-correcting" computer to Bernal's vision of the "mentally-directed mechanism." Stories in the second section, The Posthumans, detail an uneasy human and posthuman co-existence. In the third section, Across the Event Horizon, stories feature humans "living in worlds destined for Singularity." In this section is found Vinge's 2003 Hugo Award winning novella 'The Cookie Monster', an astounding ontological quest worth the price of admission alone.

It is in the fourth section, The Others, that *Digital Rapture* becomes most abstract, most frustrating and ultimately most rewarding. These are post-Singularity tales, whose authors face the daunting task of describing a world which, by definition, is beyond any current ability to comprehend. The paradox of Singularity is that the closer a writer comes to describing it, the more words simply fail. To combat this, authors may plunge deeply into linguistic abstraction as in Doctorow and Rosenbaum's 'True Names'. Or in Elizabeth Bear's 'The Inevitable Heat Death of the Universe', where metaphor is used "to construct three-dimensional approximations of ten dimensional realities." However successful the writings in this last section, they are commendable for charting what may be beyond the quantum leap. Today, with our global telecoms networks, avatars and bots, nootropics and gameshow-winning computers, the Singularity appears closer than ever. As it always does.

Mike Pursley

#### Fortean Times Verdict

FANTASTIC GLIMPSES INTO POSSIBLE FUTURES

8

# Death cab for cutie

Necrophilia is not as rare as we might think but it's probably more varied and nuanced than we might have imagined



### Necrophilia Forensic and Medico-Legal Aspects

Anil Aggrawal

CRC Press 2011

Hb, 268pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £85.00, ISBN 9781420089127

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £82.00

Who knew necrophilia was so nuanced? There is romantic necrophilia (refusal to admit that a lover is dead) and necrophagia (arousal upon cannibalising the dead). Pseudonecrophiles (who just want their partner to "lie very, very still") contrast with necromutilomaniacs (who mutilate corpses while masturbating). Acts include necrostuprum (stealing a body to have sex with it), homicidal or warm necrophilia (killing to have sex with the victim's body), and specifics like necrocunnilingus and necrobestiality. There are necrosadists, necropaedophiles, platonic or latent necrophiles, autonecrophiles, homosexual necrophiles (though no documented lesbian necrophiles), incestuous necrophiles, and nomadic necrophiles... And if you are still reading, you probably have the objectivity and distance necessary to appreciate this surprisingly lively academic book.

Forensic anthropologist Anil Aggrawal deliberately uses few photos to assist in his task, so as not to appeal to the sexual deviants whose actions and motives he illuminates. He frames the subject psychologically, criminologically, medically and legally. He tackles a tough subject with science and suffuses it with social and historical perspective.

And he succeeds mightily. This is the first book to empirically answer the question of why anyone would want to have sex with the dead. He rounds up the various types of necrophiles into a new 10-category classification that incorporates all previous schemes dating back to that of German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in 1886. The author positions role-players at one end and lust murderers at the other, with so-called "regular" necrophiles positioned in Class 8. Included are the likes of Frenchmen Henri Blot ("Everyone to his taste. Mine is for corpses"), Victor Ardisson (who claimed more than 100 corpse conquests), and Sergeant François Bertrand (about whom the word "necrophile" was coined in the mid-19th century). And of course there are plenty of serial killers, American and otherwise: Andrei Chikatilo, John Christie, Jerry Brudos, Gary Ridgway (the "Green River Killer"), Ted Bundy, and the notorious Ed Gein.

Necrophilia, writes Aggrawal, is not as rare as you would think from the dearth of reports. Victims can't report being violated, but it does happen – mostly at the hands of hospital orderlies, cemetery workers, morgue and mortuary attendants, and others with easy access to the deceased.

No single etiology can describe all cases, but proposed causes can be grouped as biological (congenital, temporal lobe anomalies) or psychological (trauma, childhood abuse and neglect, acquired mental illness,

etc.). Aggrawal provides chapters tailored to the professional (investigation, legal and ethical aspects, and expert testimony), but also offers devices that make the book approachable by a general – if morbid – audience: case studies that are not overly laborious, boxed "points to ponder," Quick Facts, and sidebars. He provides a chronology that begins in the fifth century with Herodotus's references to the liberties taken by ancient Egyptian embalmers, thoroughly references each chapter, and indexes everything you always wanted to know about necrophilia but were afraid to ask. Some of it you may regret learning, for instance the likelihood that Marilyn Monroe was assaulted by a necrophile after her death. Some of it you may be curious about (how necrophilia has pervaded classical and popular culture, for instance the Shakespeare play *Hamlet*, the fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty" by Charles Perrault, and William Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily").

And every now and then, a bit of the text will strike you as funny (for me, it was when the author made the point that necrophiles can be thought of as "anti-vampires," since unlike the legendary undead disturbing the living, they are the living disturbing the dead).

Christine Quigley

#### Fortean Times Verdict

IF YOU WONDERED WHERE DEATH'S STING HAD GOT TO, LOOK INSIDE...

9

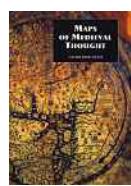
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## Maps of Medieval Thought

Naomi Reed Kline

Boydell Press 2012

Pb, 261pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £17.99, ISBN 9780851159379

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £17.99

The Hereford *mappa mundi* is the largest mediæval map and one of the most famous documents of the Middle Ages. Within a frame showing the Last Judgement and other scenes, it depicts the inhabited world, with Jerusalem at the centre. Covering the Earth are towns, rivers, animals, monsters and bizarre races such as the dog-headed Cynocephali, headless Blemyae and savage Troglodytes. Bizarre creatures like the Yale are among the most famous of historical cryptids.

The map draws on biblical sources, classical historians and geographers, mediæval bestiaries, the romances of Alexander the Great, stories of the Crusades and a wild variety of other sources to populate its landscape, covering the world with colourful characters, sacred sites and strange occurrences. To the modern eye, the map is so crammed with detail that it becomes bewildering. How did mediæval people see it? Where did its images come from and what do they mean?

Naomi Reed Kline's *Maps of Medieval Thought* is devoted to understanding the Hereford map, putting it in its context. She draws parallels with other mediæval texts and images, including maps, bestiaries, carved decorations and the circular rota diagrams used to illustrate a range of different concepts in mediæval works. Kline illustrates how the creator

or creators pilfered images and text from different sources, then used the layout of the map to make these concepts accessible to viewers with different levels of literacy.

Kline's explanation of the *mappa mundi* will begin to sound pleasantly familiar to the fortean reader: a melange of history, speculation, folklore, allegory, hearsay and outright nonsense, arranged in such a way that different viewers can create their own narratives and interpretations, drawing some of its impact from neither its credibility nor its outrageousness but from its ambiguous position between the two... Forteans will feel right at home with this concept. "One measures a circle beginning anywhere", indeed.

Although it's an academic text, Kline's book is accessible to the lay reader with an interest in mediæval history. There are definitely passages – particularly the sections dealing with literary and visual influences from other types of document – that will leave the non-specialist reader wishing she knew more about the Alexander romances or bestiaries or some other area of mediæval art. For those who want to read further, the book is extensively referenced.

If there's a problem with *Maps of Medieval Thought*, it's that there isn't enough of it. In a book about an object known for its striking visual impact, it's a shame that the limits of production mean that the reader has to be content with small monotone images of the map itself. Despite this, *Maps of Medieval Thought* is fascinating for anyone interested in mediæval thought and a must for those with an interest in the fabulous lands and creatures of the Middle Ages.

James Holloway

### Foréan Times Verdict

THE MEDIÆVAL WORLD'S VERSION OF FT DESCRIBED

## Science and Psychic Phenomena

### The Fall of the House of Skeptics

Chris Carter

Inner Traditions 2012

Pb, 303pp, \$18.95/£15.99, ISBN 9781594774515

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £14.39



This somewhat prematurely subtitled book is an updated reissue of Carter's *Parapsychology and the Skeptics* (2007). Its message, which is as relevant today as it was five years ago, is that psi phenomena (telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis) have been repeatedly and reliably documented, believed in by the majority of respondents to surveys, demonstrated in controlled laboratory experiments and published in peer-reviewed journals. However, the implications of these findings represent such a threat to the established order in the world of 'proper' science that considerable effort has been and continues to be made to distort, suppress, or simply ignore the evidence and hope it will go away. How did this state of affairs come about?

After a survey of the origins of the debate between psi researchers and their critics, Carter asks three questions: Is there conclusive experimental evidence for psi? Would the existence of psi contradict established science? Is parapsychology a science? Each question is answered at length, with appropriate references. Subject to several qualifications, the answers can be summarised as yes, no and yes. Yet members of the 'skeptical' community would, and still frequently do, claim the opposite in each case. So which side is right?

Well, for a start, parapsychology is unquestionably a science, insofar as it makes testable and falsifiable predictions, and the Parapsychological Association has been an affiliate of the American Association for the Advancement of Science since 1969, a status it could hardly have achieved without a good record of evidence from properly conducted experiments. That takes care of questions one and three. As to

whether psi is incompatible with science, it depends on which science you mean – yesterday's or today's? Carter goes to some lengths to explain that while it is wholly incompatible with 17th century science, it is not only compatible with today's but was actually predicted by the 20th century quantum theorists, as some of them have clearly stated.

Despite the founding in 1976 of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), Carter notes that only one such investigation was actually done, into the neo-astrological claims of Michel and Françoise Gauquelin's 'Mars effect' on the performance of athletes, and it was such a shambles that the Committee wisely decided to abandon any further attempts at research, a policy continued by its successor, the blandly renamed Committee for Scientific Inquiry (CSI). This is described by Carter as "a scientific vigilante organization defending a narrow brand of scientific fundamentalism, whose major goal has been to influence the media, and through it, public opinion".

One or two individual CSICOP members had a go at some original research, the best known being psychologists Susan Blackmore and Richard Wiseman in the UK and Ray Hyman in the USA, each of whom has actually produced positive results which they then attempted to spin into negative ones. Wiseman, for example, carried out a successful replication of Rupert Sheldrake's telepathic dog experiments (FT275:52), and then went round the country claiming he hadn't, and that he had "never come across a paranormal experiment that can be replicated."

On the basis of the evidence presented in this lively, well researched and fully referenced page-turner, there seems no doubt that while the House of Skeptics may not yet have fallen, its foundations are riddled with dry rot and its eventual collapse looks inevitable.

Guy Lyon Playfair

### Foréan Times Verdict

THE HOUSE OF SKEPTICS TAKES A BIT OF A BEATING HERE

8

# Fortean Fiction

## The Devil's Diadem

Sara Douglass

HarperVoyager 2011

Pb, 522pp, £7.99

ISBN 9780007364244

*The Devil's Diadem* is set in a fictional version of the early 12th century which, so far as this widely-read but non-specialist reader is concerned, is absolutely solid – as it should be; author Sara Douglass had a PhD in early modern English history.

After her father's death, Evelyn Langtofte joins the household of the Earl of Pengraic as a lady's maid. Plague strikes England and Wales, a plague which seems to have devilish origins – some victims scream at horrifying visions before bursting into flames. Despite all precautions, the plague strikes Pengraic Castle with tragic consequences, and Evelyn unexpectedly becomes closer to the Earl – but can she follow his fierce instruction to trust him, whatever happens? The horror of the plague, the demonic attacks and, perhaps worst of all, normal human selfishness, cruelty and betrayal, mount up as the story progresses. Without giving anything away, the ending is unexpected – but perfect.

Set in the Welsh Marches and in the King's palaces in London, this is one of the best written, most believable and most powerful historical fantasies I've ever read, made all the more poignant by the news that the author died, far too young, just before its publication.

## Dark Eden

Chris Beckett

Corvus 2012

Hb, 404pp, £18.99

ISBN 9781848874633

There will inevitably be comparisons between Chris Beckett's novel *Dark Eden* and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*. Both feature small communities some time in the future which have so lost touch with their human heritage that it has become mytholo-

gised. Language also changes, both in vocabulary and to some degree in structure; once the historical context of a word is lost it becomes just a label, open to misunderstanding: AnyVirsy, Genda, Secret Ree – and Stornry for an extraordinary meeting. Other terms are logical: young teens are called "newhairs", and sex, which is pretty casual, is called "slipping".

The entire society is only around 500 people, living in small tribal groups of, effectively, fairly primitive hunter-gatherers. As the novel progresses, the reader realises that they are the inbred descendants of two interplanetary explorers marooned on a planet without a sun over 150 years earlier. Teenager John Redlantern fights against the stifling conventions that constrict any development in their society, until eventually he goes too far and is cast out, going off to set up a group of his own – and eventually discovering the truth about their ancestors.

This is an excellent novel, with great characters and plot, which demonstrates quite remarkably just how quickly knowledge can be lost and mythology can develop when human society degenerates.

## Advent

James Treadwell

Hodder & Stoughton 2012

Hb, 439pp, £12.99

ISBN 9781444728460

James Treadwell's young adult novel *Advent* has had a lot of hype, and much of it is deserved. Fifteen-year-old Gavin goes to stay with his aunt in a remote village in Cornwall, but when he arrives she isn't there. Instead he meets a fey girl a couple of years younger than himself and her very old-fashioned father, living in a house that doesn't seem to have changed for centuries. Magic is in the air, and it's a dark, disturbing magic.

Interwoven with Gavin's story is the story of the greatest magus in the world, who leaves Germany in 1537 (yes, he's that magus) and is shipwrecked and drowned off the

coast of Cornwall – having put part of his soul into a mirror and "all the magic in the world" into a ring. Oddly, his story is told backwards, but this works nicely as we later discover the causes of what drives him in the earlier-told scenes. The finding of the mirror and the ring some years before the time of the novel have terrifying consequences into which Gavin is drawn.

This is a pretty powerful first novel. Generally it's nicely written, though it gets a bit saggy in the middle. It will be interesting to see how Treadwell develops his themes in the remaining volumes of this trilogy.

## Before the Delusion

William Gleeson

The Temple Publications 2012

Pb, 273pp, £14.95

ISBN 9780955597091

Every now and then a book comes along which is so utterly bad it's compelling, like when your eyes are drawn to a car crash against your will. William Gleeson's *Before the Delusion* purports to be the story of Dr Liam Kelly, an elderly Jesuit scholar who is instructed by the Machiavellian prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly called the Inquisition – and Joseph Ratzinger's last job before his promotion) to check if there's anything in the Vatican Library that might be embarrassing to the Catholic Church. (The utterly stereotyped prefect is called Cardinal Borgia, by the way.) This would be fine for a plot set-up – except that the amount of story in this "novel" could be written on the back of a postage stamp with room to spare.

Don't be taken in by the back cover blurb about it being "an historical novel". The novel structure is simply a vehicle for a badly-argued, repetitive, derivative and frankly ludicrous alternative cosmology book with four appendices, 48 figures, 19 pages of references, a long bibliography (featuring among the usual suspects eight books by Zecharia

Sitchin) and an index. Very often six or seven pages of exposition go by in the "novel" without a single mention of the main "character" – and then you get "Liam sighed heavily" before another half dozen pages.

What's it about? There's lots of Velikovsky-type catastrophist twaddle about Mars and Venus colliding and a chunk of Mars hitting Earth – "about midday on Wednesday, the 13th of March in the year 10,000 BC. Probably, more or less." We can figure out exactly where it hit by drawing a map of the standing stones at Carnac. Oh, and the pyramids were nuclear reactors (I've seen that before somewhere, too). References to Uranium-235 can be found in ancient Egyptian texts – and inscribed above the door of the Great Pyramid are symbols that translate as E=MC<sup>2</sup>. Nuff said.

But somehow I had to keep reading to see if it could get any worse. It did. Avoid.

## Rumours of the Marvellous

Peter Atkins

Alchemy Press 2011

Hb, 240pp, £19.99/

ISBN 9780953226061

*Rumours of the Marvellous* is a superb collection of short stories by Liverpudlian author Peter Atkins that fall in the borderland between SF, fantasy, horror and the supernatural. Some are set in his home town; others in his adopted home of America. The former include a couple of particularly touching ghost stories; the latter include three stories about a stroppy female private investigator specialising in the very dark and nasty magical. There are stories about art, writing, and creativity, and even a 22-page poem about exorcising a haunting – or is it? Most collections contain a couple of make-weights; with this one, every story is a gem.

I've not come across Atkins before, but he gets raves from Neil Gaiman, Ramsey Campbell and others and has written several novels as well as screenplays for three of the *Hellraiser* films. I'll be keeping an eye out for his work

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### Beasts of the Southern Wild

Dir Benh Zeitlin, US 2012

On UK release from 19 October 2012

*Beasts of the Southern Wild* is a gem of a film directed by 29-year-old first-time director Benh Zeitlin and starring a young girl (six at the time of filming) who I've decided is my hero of 2012 – Quvenzhané Wallis. It's already picked up prizes at Cannes and Sundance and it would be a shame if it doesn't pick up an Oscar as well.

The film is set in the semi-real, semi-fantastical area of the Bathtub, south of the Levee in Louisiana, in a dirt-poor community where the people are happy, laid-back and resilient. Hushpuppy is a young girl who, in the absence of her mother, is cared for by her sick father Wink. She has a lovely smile, a magnificent Afro and can pull a really fierce scowl when need be. She is also an imaginative child who believes she's broken the Universe and brought down on this small community the storm that brings floods upon their homes and sets free the mythical aurochs – prehistoric beasts that have become part of the Bathtub's unique mythology. In the course of the film Hushpuppy goes on a quest for her lost mother and tries to fix the Universe, or at least make it a bit better for her father.

Quvenzhané Wallis gives a rocking performance. Dwight Henry, as her father, is excellent too, even though he's new to films; he owned

a bakery across the road from the casting agency and auditioned for a bit of fun after chatting with the producer. The supporting characters are all quirky and interesting and help build up a convincing picture of this community in which people support one another and, above all, enjoys themselves with far more freedom than they would in the clinical and stuffy world north of the levee.

Unsteadycam is used throughout, which may be a problem for some viewers, but the setting is lovely and above all, wet. The director has water permeating everything in this film, and portrays a community which lives and works with it, while at the same time knowing that their homes will at some time be overwhelmed by it.

*Beasts of the Southern Wild* is a small film made on a tiny budget, but it has a great big heart. This sometimes joyous, sometimes sad movie, with obvious links to Hurricane Katrina and the people who survived it, will inspire even the most cynical viewer.

Julie McNamee

#### Fortean Times Verdict

PRIZE-WINNING, HEART-WARMING, MAGICAL GEM OF A FILM

8

#### Yatterman

Dir Takashi Miike, Japan 2010  
Eureka, £17.99/£19.99

Something of a departure for extreme Japanese director Takashi Miike (especially if you only know

his work from *Audition* and *Ichi the Killer*), *Yatterman* is based on an obscure 1970s anime TV show. It's a gaudy, loud, camp adventure aimed at teenagers that slightly outstays its welcome at almost two hours. The crime-fighting duo of Yatterman – Gan and his girlfriend Ai – and their mecha-dog battle the evil Doronbo Gang from their toyshop HQ. However, sultry gang leader Doronbo is tired of being defeated, surrounded as she is by tubby, incompetent henchmen. Assembling a set of ancient 'skull stones' (shades of the crystal skull mythology), might be her big break, if only she can beat the Yatterman team to them...

In an effort never to bore the viewer, Miike throws everything he's got at the screen, packing the movie with bizarre ideas and colourful incidents, refusing to linger over anything for too long. It's essentially a live-action cartoon, but not content with a simple remake of an old anime series, Miike has set out to deconstruct and re-invent the genre for modern audiences without losing its heart. It's self-aware, family-friendly (with a few trademark subversive Miike touches) and fairly silly, but may only appeal to viewers already familiar with Japanese film and TV culture. Plenty of extras put the movie in some context, though.

Brian J Robb

#### Fortean Times Verdict

MIIKE'S BIZARRE TAKE ON A CULT JAPANESE TV SHOW

6

### Monster Brawl

Dir Jesse T Cook, US 2011

Momentum Pictures Home Entertainment, £12.99

Not all of us grew up imagining what a showdown between eight classic movie monsters would be like, but one crazy man-kid did and decided to put a lot of time and effort into turning his dream into our reality.

*Monster Brawl* is one of those films that delivers exactly what is says on the tin: a fight to the death in a graveyard featuring various monsters. The film has absolutely no plot and is unashamedly content with that. When I realised this, I closed my overly critical eyes and tried to open myself up to the director's vision of eight creatures – the Mummy, the Werewolf, Zombie Man, Lady Vampire, Frankenstein's monster, Cyclops, Swamp Gut and a Witch Bitch – kicking the crap out of each other for an hour and a half.

For a film reputedly made on a shoestring budget *Monster Brawl*'s production values look surprisingly good, and it offers enough visual effects and cheesy one-liners to help get you through an astoundingly slow-paced 90-minutes.

While director-writer-producer Jesse T Cook puts in a good effort, the lack of a story ultimately leads to the film's demise. Instead of attempting to multitask, more time should have been spent avoiding the giant hole where the plot should have been that makes this movie so repetitive and sluggish. Fohnjang Ghebdinga

#### Fortean Times Verdict

RUMBLE IN THE CEMETERY COULD DO WITH A SCRIPT

4

### The Uninvited

Dir Lewis Allen, US 1944

Exposure Cinema, £14.99

*The Uninvited* has been hailed by critics and fans alike as one of the best ghost stories ever filmed (Martin Scorsese is an admirer), and now it finally gets its first release anywhere on DVD. It's the story of a fun-loving music critic (played brilliantly by Ray Milland), and his sister, who buy a neglected mansion on a whim, high on a Cornish cliff-top. But why does the studio room seem to chill the air and wilt flowers? And who is the unseen woman, sobbing deep

into the night?

It's a fascinating movie, not least because it manages to be both old fashioned and modern all at the same time. From the sweeping melodrama of Victor Young's score to the wonderful tip-of-the-hat politeness of the characters, there's a very acute sense that they really don't make them like this anymore.

Only, in so many other ways, they do. Because despite the vintage values (when was the last movie you saw where a brother and sister moved in together?) this feels like old school Hollywood creeping toward the contemporary edge.

For a start, it's one of the first Hollywood films to take the supernatural seriously. The most popular ghost films before this were the *Topper* movies – comedies about a man haunted by the spirits of a wise-cracking married couple. Yes, *The Uninvited* has a few sniggering jokes about 'spooks' but on the whole the scares are played straight. Remember, this was 1944 and perhaps the relentless body counts of WWII meant that audiences were no longer content to giggle about what might be on the 'other side'. And like so many modern ghost stories, the film's haunted protagonists are determined to understand the motivations of the ghosts. They even conduct a séance to communicate with the dead. This might sound like old horror hat these days, but back in 1944 it was a controversial topic. The Catholic Legion of Decency actively complained about the film. Saying that the occult actions of Milland and Co were being presented by Hollywood as actually 'working'. The homosexual undercurrent between two characters also made the Legion jumpy. In his book *Screened Out* (Playing Gay in Hollywood) Richard Barrios says that *The Uninvited* even became something of an underground Lesbian cult movie.

Despite the sociological subtext, though, this is basically a solid ghost story. Okay, it's not that scary (though the apparition at the end did give me a chill) and it's certainly slower-moving than most of today's horror films. But perhaps the power of *The Uninvited* is not that it scares you, but

more that it haunts you – from the stunning location to the darkness of the backstory and the glimpse of a yesteryear so pleasant on the surface and yet quite oppressed and twisted in its own particular ways.

It's not the best haunted house film ever made, but its atmosphere, style and enduring influence make it an essential watch for anyone interested in horror, or indeed cinema. Oh, and one more thing. My defining memory of Ray Milland has always been of him being one half of *The Thing With Two Heads* from 1972. It's nice to be able to replace that with something decidedly classier.

**Rev Peter Laws**

#### Fortean Times Verdict

LONG OVERDUE RELEASE FOR A CLASSY HORROR CLASSIC

8

## Earth 2: The Complete Series

Dir divers hans, US 1994-95

MediumRare Entertainment, £39.99

If the recent Steven Spielberg-produced one-season wonder *Terra Nova* seemed strangely familiar, you may recall the Steven Spielberg-produced one-season wonder *Earth 2* from 1994-5. Both saw plucky expeditions despatched to inhospitable environments: back to Earth's prehistoric past in *Terra Nova* (dinosaurs!), and to a virgin alien world in *Earth 2* (aliens!). Each featured diverse characters and each drew on the special effects of their time. Well, we're told recycling is a good thing!

Despite some decent TV guest star names (Clancy Brown, Terry O'Quinn, Tim Curry, Virginia Madsen), *Earth 2* failed to make much of an impact, although this DVD release is hyped as a 'lost sci-fi treasure'. Sadly, it ain't: this is routine, mid-1990s TV sci-fi given an unearned boost by the Spielberg name. It was slightly ahead of the curve in featuring a female lead (Debrah Farentino), but the environmental themes and social issues are preachy, the action-adventure side of things is lacking and it all relies too heavily on obnoxious child characters.

**Brian J Robb**

#### Fortean Times Verdict

SPIELBERG'S MAGIC TOUCH DOESN'T TRANSFER TO TV

5

## DOUG MCCLURE: LEGEND

### THE LAND THAT TIME FORGOT/AT THE EARTH'S CORE/WARLORDS OF ATLANTIS

(StudioCanal, £15.99 each)

For forteans of a certain age, the name Doug McClure is synonymous with adventure – usually battling dinosaurs and/or fighting to free an enslaved mankind in low-budget, 1970s British films. This clutch of titles is what that legend and legacy are based on. Admittedly, watched together, these productions come across as merely variations on the same theme. But like a rainbow of Rothkos, or any number of Ramones albums, there is still much to enjoy here.

*The Land That Time Forgot* started the ball rolling in 1975 and introduces us to director Kevin Connor's trademark strengths (and weaknesses.) He's good with panoramas (actually surprisingly good painted screens at Shepperton Studios) and volcanoes but doesn't frame fight-sequences well, and close-ups can sometimes push towards the point of embarrassment. None of this, though, can stand in the way of a good story and this one (from Edgar Rice Burroughs), is a cracker. During WWI a ruthless U-boat commander, Captain Von Schoenorts (John McEnery), sinks a civilian vessel unwittingly taking on its survivors (McClure, Susan Penhaligan). Hopelessly lost, they end up in the uncharted land of Caprona, which seemingly contains all stages of evolution simultaneously – from crap cavemen to crap dinosaurs you can shoot with revolvers. Yes, the costumes and effects are laughably naïve and all the more charming for it, but when one discovers the entire location shoot for this venture was a sandpit in Reading, it kinda makes sense.

*At The Earth's Core* is again by Burroughs and features more dinosaurs and enslaved humans (it's not the sequel to *Land*; that was *The People That Time Forgot*). Here, Doug is supported by a stronger cast; Peter Cushing, perennial schoolboy fantasy Caroline Munro and then hipster Cy Grant. A bigger budget ensures a Steampunk overdose of gyroscopes, levers and dials as a giant drill takes our heroes to another forgotten world. Here, in Pelucidar, humans have been enslaved by telepathic dinosaur-parrots. Doug comes over all *Spartacus* (or Charlie Heston in *Planet of the Apes*), and leads the slaves to freedom. Cushing is criminally underused, although he does get the best line in the film: "You cannot mesmerise me, I'm British". Also note that by now Doug's cemented his acting style; look pretty and rugged and try not to speak if possible.

Amicus Studios' *Warlords of Atlantis* (1978) was written for the screen by *Doctor Who* veteran Brian Hayles and is bizarre enough to enthrall the most jaded connoisseur. This time it's a giant octopus which drags our intrepid band (usual faces and names) down to the lost cities (there were seven originally, only five remain) of Atlantis. To some (the smart and attractive), this land is paradise; to the masses, though, fall the same lives of drudgery and misery we've seen in most fictional undersea worlds. The twist? The future the Atlanteans have planned for us is nothing less than Hitler and the rise of Nazism – all to facilitate their leaving Earth for Outer Space...again. Beat that, Ick!

Doug McClure died young in 1995. In his last decade he returned to his first home, American TV, with extended residencies on *Fantasy Island* and *The Fall Guy*. His boyish looks never deserted him, but it's for these films he is among the immortals... and no one else ever fought undersea Nazis armed with rubber flying fish.

**Tim Weinberg 8/10**

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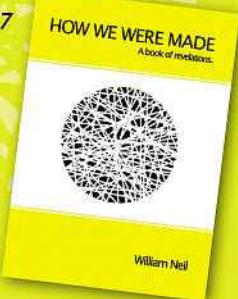
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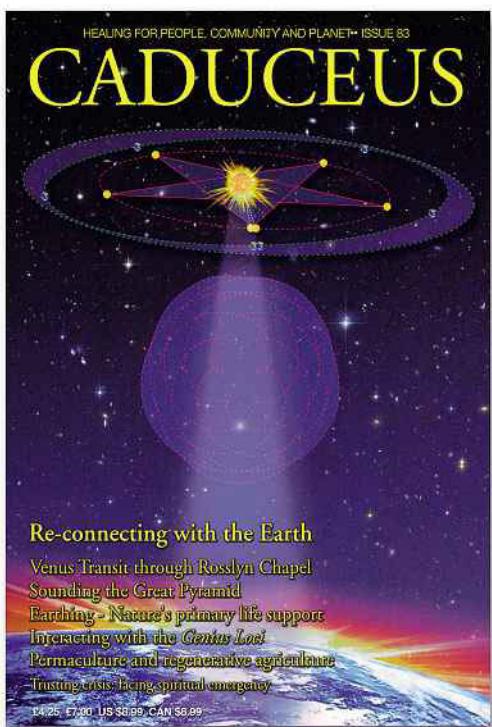
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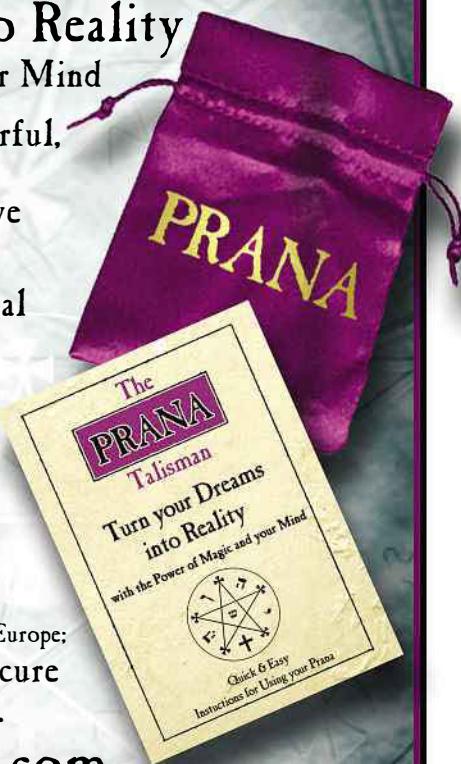
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Dear FT...

# letters



## Sacred stones

Congratulations and thanks to David Hambling on his fascinating article on bætys [FT292:46-50]. Undoubtedly, these extraterrestrial stones have played pivotal and controversial rôles in many religions, as he argues – but I think that he may have overstated his case with Christianity. When St Paul talks about Christ as a stone he is using the metaphor of a building where each Christian is part of the building but Christ is the cornerstone: no sign that it is any other way a special stone apart from its rôle in keeping the building standing. Likewise when Jesus renames Simon “Peter”, the rock; Jesus is using a building metaphor as he does in the parable of the two builders, one of whom builds on sand and the other on rock. What better to build on than a rock?

The Mass came to be celebrated on a table of stone symbolising Christ as the “living stone”. More importantly, an altar is a place of sacrifice. The concept of the priest in any way re-enacting the sacrifice of Christ is one the 16th century Reformers opposed – hence the removal of many stone altars and their replacement with wooden tables. This concept of Christ being sacrificed on an altar in turn goes back to the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham and not the altar at Bethel (which David Hambling makes a good case for as a meteorite). There is no suggestion the altar Abraham builds is in any way special or made of stone.

In short: sometimes a stone is just a stone.

**Andy Froud**  
The Vicarage, Clitheroe, Lancashire

## Spirit photos

In the ‘Random Dictionary of The Damned’ entry on spirit photos [FT291:46-49], the Hierophant’s Apprentice, writing about Frederick Hudson, England’s first spirit photographer, states: “Hudson apparently used a custom camera, made by Howell’s, suppliers to the conjuring trade, that flipped a pre-prepared wax-paper positive of the

‘extra’ in front of the glass plate immediately before the shot was taken”. If they have no evidence, many sceptics will use the word “apparently”.

In *Photographing the Invisible* (1922), James Coates mentions a Mr Slater, an instrumental maker who decided to test Hudson for fraud, and on his second visit, brought his own lens, plates and camera to Hudson’s home. At no stage was Hudson allowed to handle the equipment, but Slater still managed to get “spirit photos”. The belief that all the spiritual photos must have been faked because “that follows from the inability of anyone to explain how a genuine spirit photo might be taken in the first place” is a logical fallacy.

The Hierophant’s Apprentice claims that light is registered on film, but this is inaccurate. Film can pick up radiation, some of which we call light.

**Mike Williams**  
Hazelbrook, Australia

## The Long Man of Wilmington

Re the description of the Long Man of Wilmington as “certainly ancient” [FT292:22]: I was under the impression that most of these chalk sites had undergone recent investigation by experts, the conclusion being that The White Horse of Uffington was the only truly ancient chalk site in England, being about 3,000 years old; the others mostly being Victorian or thereabouts.

**Mike Kerins**  
New Moston, Manchester

**Paul Devereux replies:**  
I suppose I was a bit gung-ho saying it was “certainly” ancient – “possibly” might have been safer. Nevertheless, it is certainly older than the Victorian era, as there is a sketch of the figure made in 1710. To my knowledge, the feature has never been directly dated, the closest being a geoarchaeological analysis of a trench cut at the foot of the hill slope eight or nine years ago, which showed that there had been some disturbance

## Simulacra Corner



The Blå Jungfrun island in the Baltic Sea has for centuries had a reputation for witchcraft [FT219:44-48]. The last time Johan Theorin visited, he was greeted by this friendly pine tree.

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*on the slope in the 16th or 17th century. This is not proof of the age of the original Long Man of Wilmington. The picture is further confused because the hill figure has been ‘restored’ a number of times down the centuries, and the exact appearance and nature of the original feature (which may have been a subtle, overgrown “green” image for much of its life) is all but lost. However, despite its various incarnations, we might suppose that some basic elements of its appearance have survived, though details have most probably been lost.*

*There remain contesting speculations that the original Long Man (now lost) was, variously, Neolithic, Bronze or Iron Age, Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon, or even mediæval Christian. There is evidence, of varying quality, to support most of these speculations. There are Anglo-Saxon images of a warrior holding spears in a similar pose to the Long Man, but the Onega image [FT292:22] is the closest to the appearance of the hill figure, and that petroglyph is prehistoric. As I indicated, this might just be a bizarre coincidence, but it does beg some questions.*



## Strangely Salty Lake

I work in Amesbury in Wiltshire and nearby there are the hamlets of Wilsford and Lake – hence this rather amusing sign. It makes me wonder what passing visitors to the area must think is in the locale.

**Paul "Tiny" Jackson, Wiltshire**

## Unreliable Haining

The extensive coverage of M R James [FT292:30-37] is very welcome and Robert Lloyd Parry's article is excellent. There is one correction, however, which needs to be made to Ramsey Campbell's appreciation in "Celebrating M R James", and it relates to a topic which has come up more than once in previous issues of *Fortean Times*: the extreme unreliability of the late Peter Haining. Ramsey Campbell says: "In the December 1929 issue of *The Bookman*... James demonstrates his familiarity with the genre, even tracing the roots of *Dracula* to (apparently) a sceptical article on vampirism from the November 1856 issue of *Chambers's Repository*". James's exact quotation was: "I fancy, by the way, that *[Dracula]* must be based on a story in the fourth volume of *Chambers's Repository*, issued in the Fifties".

In Peter Haining's *M.R. James: Book of the Supernatural* (1979), the claim was made that the item in question was the essay "The Vampire of Kring" – this is the "sceptical article" of (supposedly) 1856 referred to by Campbell. Unfortunately, wherever Haining found "The Vampire Kring", which he reprints in the *Book of the Supernatural*, it wasn't in *Chambers's Repository*. Researchers (in particular, Douglas A Anderson) have examined every volume of that publication, which, incidentally, was only published from 1852 to 1854, so even the date asserted by

Haining is wrong. Aside from the fact that "The Vampire of Kring" is about – you guessed it – vampires, there is absolutely no connection between it and Dracula.

The unnamed story that James was indicating has now been identified as something else entirely: "The Mysterious Stranger", a fictional vampire tale which may well have been an influence on *Dracula* as it shares some of the same themes and ideas. "The Mysterious Stranger" appeared anonymously ("translated from the German") in an 1854 edition of the *Repository*, but Douglas Anderson has tracked down the author as C von Wachsmann (1787-1862).

One mystery remains: where on earth did Haining find that essay on "The Vampire of Kring", and why was he so dishonest about it? It appears from internal evidence to have come from a source dating to the last quarter of the 19th century or early in the 20th, but no one has yet located it. Perhaps *FT* readers might have some thoughts on this.

**Rosemary Pardoe**  
Hoole, Cheshire

## Inca bones

Regarding the discovery in Florida of a skull exhibiting a sutural anomaly claimed to be "a telltale sign from the Incan culture of Peru", and another with the same trait from Sarpsborg, Norway [FT291:20-21]: the anomaly concerned, the so-called 'Inca bone'

(also known as the epactal bone), is not, as your report states, a 'split neck bone' but a supernumerary bone or ossicle sited at the back of the skull between the occipital and parietal bones.

After noting the presence of the epactal bone in two Peruvian mummies, Plymouth surgeon Dr CF Bellamy, in a paper read to the Zoological section of the British Association in 1842, wondered whether it was "a normal formation peculiar to this race of beings." (*Annals and Magazine of Natural History*, Oct 1842, 95-100). Zoolologists ME Rivero and JJ Tschudi, who had examined many Incan and other Peruvian skulls, had no doubt that the epactal bone was unique to the crania of the indigenous peoples of Peru. They said that it constitutes "a perpetual anomalous phenomenon, which is wanting in all other [races]." (*Antig edades Peruanas*, 1851, pp.38-9). It was Tschudi who is credited with having given it the name *os Incae*.

Twentieth century anthropological research has shown that the Inca bone is not unique to the people after whom it is named, but from your report it would seem that there are some people who still believe it to be so. In point of fact, while its frequency is generally high in the New World, it has been recorded with varying frequencies in the skulls of populations in northeast Asia, India, Australia and sub-Saharan Africa; it is also present in Europe where its frequency is relatively low. It has even occasionally been noted in English crania, including those of 11-12<sup>th</sup> century Londoners (W White: *Skeletal Remains from the Cemetery of St. Nicholas Shambles, City of London*, 1988, p.34).

The origin of cranial non-metrical traits, including the Inca bone, has long been debated by anatomists. Many years ago it was suggested that the formation of sutural bones is related to a metabolic disorder of the mesoderm (L Hess (1946): *Ossicula wormiana*, *Hum. Biol.* 18: 61-80); another authority concluded that they are inherited as dominant traits with about 50 per cent penetration (J Torgerson (1951): "The developmental genetics and evolutionary meaning of the metopic suture", *Amer. J. Phys. Anthropol.* n.s. 9, 193). Environmental conditions of a

stressful nature may also play an important rôle in their development (KA Bennett (1965): "The Etiology and Genetics of Wormian Bones", *Amer. J. Phys. Anthropol.* 23: 255-260).

Whatever their genesis, non-metrical cranial traits have been successfully employed by anatomists in separating the larger groups of mankind as effectively as series of cranial measurements (DR Brothwell (1963): *Digging up Bones*, 94-5).

Supernumerary cranial ossicles are commonly known as 'wormian bones', after the 17th century Danish anatomist Ole Worm, who accurately described them (though not the first to do so), in a letter to a compatriot in 1643 (R Olry (1988): "L'Os Épactal: étude historique et terminologique crânio-cervico-faciale", pp.21-22). They may be found in any cranial suture, but mostly occur along the lambdoid suture. What is probably the earliest description of a cranial sutural bone was made by the Italian physician Bartolomeo Eustachi in 1534 (S Ivanovic (1982): *Ancient Diseases*, p.93). Powdered human bone was at this time an ingredient in a number of medical remedies, and cranial ossicles were believed to be particularly efficacious in the treatment of epilepsy. Thus in 1571 the physician and humanist Johann Winter von Andernach (Ioannes Guinterius Andernacus), in deference to his influential contemporary the physician and occultist Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (known as Paracelsus), referred to one particular ossicle as the *ossculum anti-epilepticum Paracelsi* (*De Medicina veteri et nova*, 1571).

**Bari Hooper**  
Newport, Essex

## Wrong ship

The sideline 'Sunk before' [FT291:8] claimed that the ship that sank at the beginning of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* bore the name *Concordia*, the same as the vessel that sank off the Italian coast in January 2012. In fact, this scene occurs in the introduction to *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, and the ship that sinks is named *Coronado* – a reference to the artefact called 'The cross of Coronado', which is what the young Indy (played by River Phoenix) is

trying to recover from the baddies in the introduction to the film.

**Robert Amos**  
Bristol

## Cryptid Rays

A recent 'flap' of ghostly manta ray sightings from West Virginia and eastern Kentucky has been reported by motorists, who describe a stingray-like cryptid that seems to fly through the air as it keeps pace with the car for brief moments. Five hundred million years ago during the Cambrian Period this part of the United States was covered by a shallow sea. There is a theory that lake monsters such as Nessie, Morag and Champ are ghosts of prehistoric creatures that once flourished in the areas of their modern-day sightings. Could the 'flying rays' of Kentucky and West Virginia be ghosts of prehistoric marine life? And why have these apparitions made their presence known only recently?

**Greg May**  
Orlando, Florida

## Hoax fish?

I note a number of inconsistencies in the report and chest X-ray of Anil Barela [FT291:18]. An inhaled fish would be expected to come to rest within a narrow portion of the bronchial tree, such as the bronchus intermedius or lower lobe bronchus, yet the imaged fish has extended pelvic, anal, dorsal and tail fins – unlikely for a fish jammed in a fleshy tube. The position of the fish within the thorax does not correspond with the expected orientation or position of these bronchial branches, suggesting that the fish is external to the patient or has been superimposed on the image. In addition, the patient's ribs and skeleton are clearly defined while the fish's skeleton and internal structures are not. The fish is remarkably homogenous.

Chest X-rays are displayed as though the patient were sitting across from the viewer, and on Mr Barela's X-ray the aortic arch is appropriately positioned on the left side (the viewer's right), suggesting that the image has not been reversed. The accompanying text states that "the left lung was completely opaque...", however the fish is projected over the right

lung, and the chest is not "completely opaque". There is a large cavitating lesion in the right lung apex, but the lung is otherwise aerated.

Overall the imaging findings are inconsistent with the accompanying story, and suggest a hoax, possibly involving a toy fish.

**Ken Crocker PhD, MD, FRCP(C)**  
By email

## Sonic testing

In your article 'Noises off...' [FT291:14], I read with interest the section about the rumbles affecting Vancouver Island in British Columbia. I stayed there at the end of March and early April 2012 to visit my uncle, who works for the Department of Defence in Victoria Docks. He described the rumbles to me and also that there had been whale beachings. He ascribed this issue to the Naval exercises and sonic testing the US military had been doing off the coast of Washington State. Interestingly, a quick google search brought up an article about conservation groups taking the military to court for the naval exercises and their effect on marine life. The Fox News article (at <http://bit.ly/wR4fKJ>) mentions "sonic testing and the resulting flight of orcas and dolphins near the San Juan Islands".

**Lisa Brown**  
Bromsberrow Heath,  
Gloucestershire

## Lightning odds

I can't fault James Dixon's calculations on cephalopod football punditry ('Odds for Octopus' FT269:79), but I must protest at his assertion that one is 23 times more likely to be struck by lightning than to win the National Lottery. The Tornado and Storm Research Organisation (TORRO) gives figures for the British Isles, stating that there are on average 300,000 ground strikes per annum and that 30 to 60 people each year are hit. Now, the population of the British Isles is hovering around 67,000,000. If we take the higher of the two figures, that works out as around 8.95 people per 10,000,000 population – or 1 in 1,117,318 – are struck by lightning in the British Isles in a bad year. Mr Dixon's figure is twice that at 1 in 600,000. It might well

be that a full half of the people who do get struck by lightning do so with the minimum of fuss and are thus unreported. I struggle to believe this, though using either figure it still seems more likely to be struck than the 1 in 13,983,816 to win the lottery. However, there are 104 lottery draws per year and you can enter as many times as you wish, which you can never do with lightning. Sure you can seed clouds, fly through them, and fire rockets trailing wire into them, but there is no guarantee of a strike.

For those of you unmoved by this, I will distance myself from petty research and GCSE "adding stuff up" and move to fact. In the first 10 years of the National Lottery there were 928 draws resulting in over 1,700 millionaires. Using the 23x model, that equates to 39,100 people or 3,910 each year being struck by lightning, a massive figure. And that's just the millionaires. On 14 January 1995, 133 people won the top lottery prize and 57 won on 16 March 1996. I know that my research is neither exhaustive nor scientific and my figures are simplified but I cannot but help draw two alternative conclusions from this. One is clearly much more likely to win the lottery than be struck by lightning, so keep playing and paying, your time will come. Even the meanest player, to whom the vagaries of probability are a mystery, knows that you have to be in it to win it.

**Louie Gabia**  
Somerset

## Brain and mind

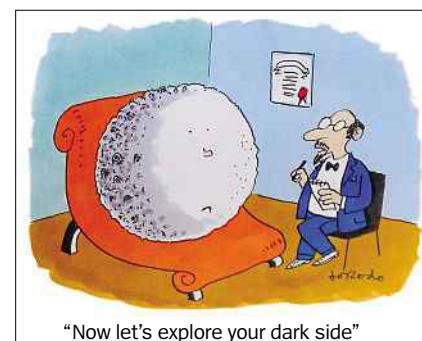
Arnold Taylor's letter on reincarnation, consciousness and the possible infinite nature of the Universe [FT289:69] was very interesting and thought-provoking. I would just like to point out, however, that the idea of the brain being the seat or source of our consciousness could be as speculative as the rest of his letter openly is. How we can hope to establish a 'joining point' between something physical (brain) and something non-physical (consciousness) seems to me a little odd. What is fairly certain is that these are potentially two fundamentally

different things that may operate with very different parameters and it may not be possible to impose one dimension, such as locality with a physical phenomenon, on to another type of phenomenon for which the idea of locality has to be a bit of a stretch. Can we say that anything non-physical has a locality in the way we might understand it?

People might say that experimental evidence of brain activity linked to specific conscious events constitutes evidence of the connection between brain and consciousness. Well, it may be that there is indeed some kind of connection between brain and consciousness, but that is most definitely not the same as the assumption that the brain itself 'generates' consciousness. What such experiments cannot get away from is that they are actually measuring events in the brain and not really necessarily directly 'looking at' consciousness itself.

Maybe the "seat of consciousness", if there is one to define, is our whole body rather than just our brain. It seems somewhat reductionist and related to our need to chop up and compartmentalise experience to say that only the brain generates consciousness. After all, we are able to negotiate existence only with the full package and would not survive without at least a reasonable portion of the rest of our bodies intact. Maybe it's not helpful to see the brain as distinct from the rest of the body and we should look at the process of the whole organism instead. Or maybe consciousness is not generated by any part of the physical world and something else entirely different is happening. There seem to be many possibilities.

**Sarah Louise**  
Exeter, Devon



"Now let's explore your dark side"

JOHN ROBERT DOCHERTY

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of [www.foarteantimes.com](http://www.foarteantimes.com)

## My sister's poltergeist

My sisters and I have been the subjects of hauntings for as long as I can remember. Right now, my concern is for my youngest sister. When my parents moved from their home of 25 years, about four years ago, I thought she would be free of the entities we suffered growing up – but I've been proven wrong.

I've experienced very little since moving to the new house – some rustlings in the night, voices and groans (some of which my mother and I heard together), but nothing that would really alarm me after having lived at the old house. The activity now seems to happen around my 16-year-old sister. Light bulbs have been known to shoot from their sockets around her. Lights will either turn on and off in her presence, or at times will refuse to turn off when she hits the switch. If it were strictly an electrical problem, you'd think after four years someone else would have had the same thing happen to them, but no, it's just her.

Glasses have shattered in her room, shoving themselves forcefully off shelves or off her dresser. She'll wake up in the morning with deep scratches and bruises on her back and legs. The bruises I could possibly explain away, with her being a heavy sleeper and sometimes rolling into the wall in the night, but the scratches throw me. She has a horrid habit of biting her nails down to nubs... by some stretch of the imagination (and considering the length of her nails, it'd be a big one) I might see the scratches on her legs as being possibly self-inflicted, but not down the middle of her back – sometimes a continuous scratch from between her shoulder blades to the small of her back.

In the old house, as well as the new one, she's been more prone to 'seeing' whatever it is around her than myself or our other sisters. She's seen white mists and dark mists that will hover for a moment, then dash through a wall.

She has other things happen that are less frightening and which we're quite accustomed to. She'll

feel someone in the room with her, or staring at her, or see shadows moving around. One time, while she was washing dishes, she stepped out of the kitchen for a moment and came back to find all the plastic cups out of the cabinet, stacked in a pyramid shape. No one else went into the kitchen behind her – she would have seen – and no one really had time to take the cups out and stack them in such a fashion.

I wouldn't be concerned about these things accept that whatever it is around her seems to have some violent tendencies. I'm going to ask her to keep a journal of her moods and the goings-on in the house to see if her negativity has any bearing on happenings around her. The ghosts of the old house were mean and cruel, but at least we were never attacked outright, or had anything thrown directly at us. They seemed to subsist more on mental anguish.

I'm thinking possibly these things are coming from somewhere

within herself, somewhat like a poltergeist. I don't feel it's anything that's followed her over from the old house, as it's not their style. Perhaps something new has taken a 'liking' to her? Something from within her? What do you think?

**Name withheld**

*By email*

## Behind the mirror

About 1970, I was 24 and living in a flat in a suburb of Sydney called Eastwood. Something woke me from a dreamless sleep one night – it must have been because the room, which was normally dark at

**Light bulbs have been known to shoot out of their sockets around her**

2 or 3 in the morning, was light enough to see. There was a floor-standing swivel mirror about 5.5ft (1.7m) high at the foot of the bed, and I had the impression that there was something behind it, a sort of 'shadow', so I got up to have a look. There was a figure there, quite solid-looking and standing slightly sideways, with its eyes unblinking and staring into the corner of the room near the head of the bed. It didn't look aggressive, but had an impassive expression. It was quite a bit shorter than the mirror, I would say shorter than 5ft (1.5m). It had a very stocky build, long matted curly black hair, and an extremely ugly face with a big 'lumpy' nose and bloodshot eyes. Quite dark skin, and wrinkly. I seem to recall its clothing as being a very dirty white in coarse material, something like a hessian smock, and with a belt around the middle.

In the couple of seconds it took me to scream and run to the bedroom door, it had gone. I lived in that flat for about two years and this was the only strange thing to happen there. It couldn't have been a real person, as I was on the second floor and he would have needed a ladder, of which there was no sign. I don't think it was a nightmare, as on first waking up I felt calm – and I hadn't had a drink that day! I have never been able to come up with an explanation, and neither have I told it to anyone outside my own family.

My husband, who had been laughing and jeering at this story whenever I mentioned it over the last 27 years, stopped laughing three years ago. In February 2009, when he was staying in a 16th century hotel in Colchester, he saw a ghost – not once, but half a dozen times. This annoyed him, because he was adamant that no such things existed.

**Beryl Goodliffe**

*By email*

## Ancestral Ghost

My parents told me that when I was young – around three or four – I'd either wake them up in the night or tell them in the morning of an "old soldier man" standing next to my bed. This went on for a couple of years until they bought me a new bed to replace the old wrought-iron bedstead. They asked me to



describe the "old soldier man" and I said he was in a green uniform holding a big gun and that he had a dark red face.

It wasn't until I was in my mid-teens that I asked them about it as it had suddenly come back to me. Apparently, the bed belonged to my great grandfather who had served in World War I as an infantryman and had died just before I was born. The thing that really made my hair stand on end was that they then told me he had a port wine birthmark that covered most of one side of his face.

I do now have a photo of him and I like to think he was watching over me like a guardian angel...

**Robert G Rowell**

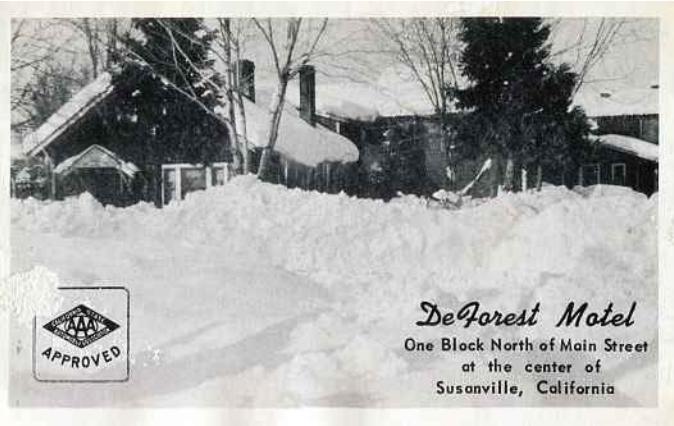
*By email*

## The DeForest Motel

Back in the late 1960s my parents bought a motel business, the DeForest Motel, in Susanville, California. We lived in the 'home' part of the motel, which had the lobby/ office in front and our house behind. It had old room units on the right-hand side and a line of new units on the left. It was two blocks off the town's main street. That's why we seemed to get customers last, after the Main Street places had filled up. We did have a couple of notable guests stay with us, like the actor Tim Conway, who'd been in the TV show *McHale's Navy*, and one of the *Hawai Five-O* actors who played Chin Ho on that show. I remember being introduced to both of them in the lobby.

But the motel was haunted. Some of the college guys who rented rooms with us reported strange experiences, like the one in unit 29 who saw a sort of 'spectre' like a white glow or mist in a doorway. My dad saw 'it' too, in the doorway of the kitchen, as he sat minding the lobby alone one night and watching TV. Sitting in the chair, he felt chills and turned to look behind him - 'it' was hovering in the doorway. He asked 'it' to come and watch TV, if 'it' wanted to. 'It' just went poof and vanished.

Other parts of the motel had a bad feeling. My brother and I tried a bedroom set up in the attic, which you got to by a spooky staircase, but that didn't last long. One night I felt an entity watching us from the doorway,



### DeForest Motel

One Block North of Main Street  
at the center of  
Susanville, California

and woke up very scared. On other occasions I thought I glimpsed shadowy figures. We told our parents about how scary it was in the attic, even in the daylight. They moved our bedroom out of there. It was above the lobby, and my feeling was that there was 'something' from the past still there - something very bad. Maybe old man DeForest had done something awful years ago.

The basement was just as bad; I always thought there was possibly something buried down there, under a kind of door or hatch in the floor, over on the dark, left-hand side. My parents set up a ping-pong room down there for my brother and I, and we had a frightening encounter while playing. Something was in that dark corner... and something threw a piece of cedar bark and nearly hit my brother in the head.

None of this was good, and one time we even had a visit from a local minister. My dad played him a tape recording of strange sounds he'd made one night. The clergyman was so scared by it he never came back.

After all the odd experiences, my family had a bankruptcy on the motel, and we moved out of the state. But one misfortune after another has been my family's lot since then. And it makes me wonder - why?

**Neal Allen**

*By email*

## The Ghosts of Traitor's Court

Around 1985 or 1986, I accepted a position as assistant manager of a restaurant/bar in the town of Ancaster, Ontario. The place was divided between two floors: the ground floor resembled a roadside, the upper floor was supposed to be a fine-dining lounge,

which never took off. The kitchen was located on the upper floor, which meant that if someone in the lower level wanted food, the bartender would have to call upstairs using an intercom system.

One Saturday morning, I arrived at 9.45am to open up with two employees, Sheila and Dan. I unlocked the front door and we all went to the bar to have a quick coffee before starting work. As we were sitting there, the intercom system came on as if by itself. This could only mean that someone was using the upstairs intercom. I remember not being able to understand what was being said, but I grabbed both employees and all three of us went upstairs to see who was there. There was no one. We searched the entire place and found no one; and I knew no one had left because I had locked the door behind me when I came in, and it was still locked.

As we stood puzzling over this, the intercom came on again and asked: "Who are you people?" By this time, we were freaking out. Feeling stupid, I asked, "Who are you?" The response that came back in a mournful, shaky voice was, "I'm so cold."

By this time, none of us was in very good shape. We searched every square inch of that building and, again, found no one.

I have since heard that intercom systems like this one are able to pick up CB traffic, police radios, and so on. However, the voice we heard didn't seem to fit in with this, and, moreover, seemed to answer us when we asked a question.

The background of the building is as follows: the bar was named 'Traitor's Court'. The reason for this is that during the War of 1812, the US, upset with the British practice of impressing American sailors, invaded Canada a number of times. These invasion attempts were repulsed through a combination of British leadership, the reputation of Indian savagery in battle, and the ineptitude of certain American generals. However, the British leadership on the spot always worried that the population of Upper Canada (as Ontario was then known) would prove seditious, because so many of them had left the US after the Revolutionary War, either because they were Loyalists or were attracted by cheap land. Consequently, during the summer of 1814, trials known as the Ancaster Assizes were held in this very building. Fifteen people were sentenced to death here, mainly on trumped-up charges. And although the actual executions took place at the British fortifications on Burlington Heights, about five miles (8km) away, I firmly believe something stayed in the old courthouse.

Once, on another occasion, I went upstairs to the kitchen to get something, knowing no one was up there. As I got to the top of the stairs, I saw a bus cart roll by itself across the entire length of the dining room. Lights went on and off and items moved by themselves. I never had anything as dramatic as the voice over the intercom happen again. These days, the place is still open under a different name (the Coach & Lantern), and they even advertise that it is haunted!

**Anon**

*Fortean Times Message Board*

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# POLICE

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## 16. THE WHITE GORILLA

When looking through a large ledger of Victorian cuttings from the *Illustrated Police News*, I came across a very curious illustrated account of the 'White Gorilla' exhibited at the Royal Aquarium, London, in 1886. It is a generally accepted fact that the only known white (albino) gorilla was the celebrated Snowflake (Floquet de Neu in Catalan), resident at the Barcelona zoological gardens from 1966 until his death in 2003. The discovery of another, historical case of an albino gorilla would be quite a zoological sensation. But before asking *Nature* magazine to clear the front page, it seemed prudent to investigate the White Gorilla's career further.

The White Gorilla's first newsworthy action took place in December 1885, when the *Era* newspaper published the following advertisement:

*WANTED, all Proprietors of Music Halls, Museums, Circuses, and Menageries to know that Mr Whiteley, Proprietor of Allsop's Wax-works, Liverpool, has purchased a White Gorilla, accompanied by a Black one, which will be exhibited at his Establishment, Lime-street, Liverpool, during the Christmas Holidays.*

*Note – This is the only White Gorilla ever known. Open to engagements after the Holidays or to be Sold. Price of White one, 250 guineas, and the Black, 85 guineas.*

Allsopp's Waxworks was a large establishment, boasting not less than 450 wax effigies and other curious items. When a *Liverpool Mercury* journalist went to see the White Gorilla, he was impressed by the docility of the animal. Mr Whiteley freely allowed his three-year-old son to enter its den. Accepting it as a true white gorilla, he recommended all the curious of Liverpool to see it before it was removed to the Metropolis.

And indeed, it did not take long for Mr Whiteley to accept an offer for the White Gorilla to be exhibited at the Royal Aquarium in London. A newspaper advertisement again pronounced it the only one of its kind in the world; indeed, Mr Whiteley offered £100 to any person who could produce its match.

**It seemed quite friendly, though it was sometimes frightened by the drunk and rowdy spectators**



A *Standard* journalist who went to see the Gorilla was most impressed with the animal: it was certainly a true gorilla, he wrote, about 26in (66cm) tall, and probably aged three or four years. Mr Whiteley had purchased it from South Africa. Its body was pale and nearly hairless, except that the crown of the head was covered with black fur, with a whisker growth down each cheek. The Gorilla was quite tame and affectionate, clasping Mr Whiteley round the neck and kissing him like a child. It answered to the name of 'Bob'. The Gorilla drank thirstily from a tumbler, just like a human being, and had a most intelligent manner. In contrast, the Black Gorilla was quite fierce and angry, and could be handled only by Mr Whiteley. The journalist ended his article with the remarkable words: "The contrast of the two animals is very great, and as the transformation of negroes into white men has not yet become a recognised fact, so the appearance of a healthy white gorilla which is not an albino, is a mystery in the development

of species not yet solvable upon the ordinary hypotheses."

The *Standard* article was copied or abbreviated into many other newspapers. The White Gorilla was mentioned in the *New York Sun*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Otago Daily Times* in faraway New Zealand. That useful newspaper, the *IPN*, was the only periodical to feature a drawing of the animal, from life. The zoological correspondent to the *Daily News* accepted the White Gorilla as an albino, blandly commenting that if there were white rabbits and white blackbirds, the gorilla species should be correspondingly afflicted with albinism. A writer in *Moonshine* magazine thought the Gorilla most curious. It seemed quite tame and friendly, although it was sometimes frightened by the drunk and rowdy spectators gawping at it. He suspected that the tumbler the Gorilla drank from contained beer, so that the animal "was just 'like a human being' – of the Aquarium variety"! A punning writer in the appositely named *Fun* magazine thought the 'ape-pearance' of the White Gorilla most peculiar; Dr Charles Darwin, had he lived, would have thought this specimen the 'ape-x' of zoological discovery.

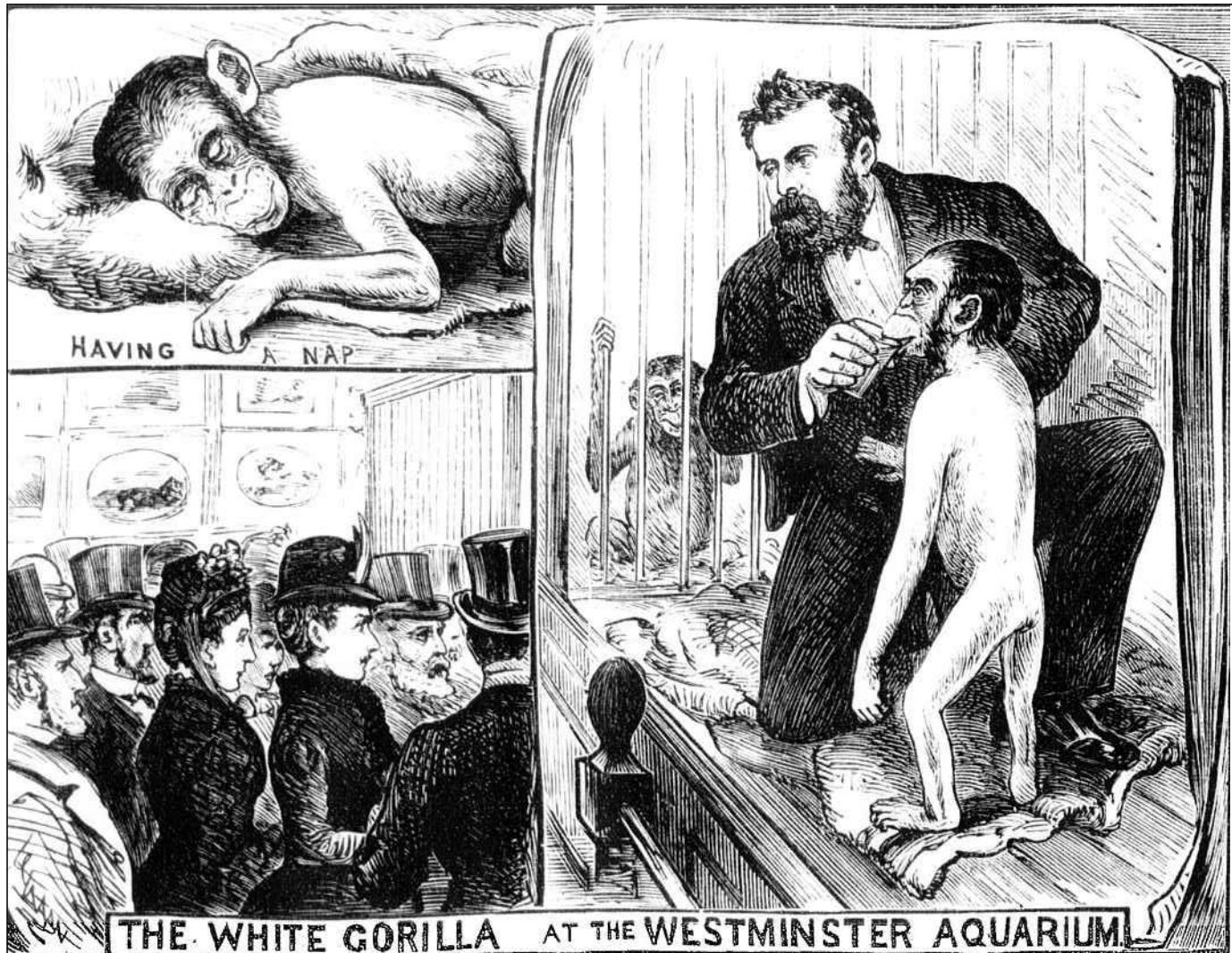
Thus the White Gorilla ended its four-month innings in the London and provincial press 'not out': no zoologist or newspaper correspondent exposed it as a fraud, and one of them confidently declared it an albino. But from the valuable *IPN* illustration, this could not be possible, since its head is clearly seen to be covered with normal dark hair. Furthermore, the animal looked quite unlike a young gorilla.

When I consulted that experienced zoologist Richard Freeman, whose cryptozoological writings should be known to every fortean, he at once proclaimed the 'White Gorilla' a young chimpanzee. This was obvious from the shape of its head and the size of its ears. The body and limbs of the animal had been deliberately shaved to expose its pale skin, and the purpose of its elaborate coiffure had been to give it a humanoid appearance. The skin of a chimpanzee varies in colour depending on which part of Africa it comes from, and some of them have pale skin just like a European human. If the animal was unwell, as its

TIONAL STORIES FROM

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# NEWS



ABOVE: The 'White Gorilla', from the *Illustrated Police News*, 6 February 1886.

remarkable docility might suggest, the skin would appear paler still.

Thus my paper on the 'White Gorilla' ended up here rather than in *Nature*. It is sad that Michael Jackson, well known for his fondness for chimpanzees, and his fascination with dark-skinned individuals transforming into whites, is no longer alive to read it. The reason the 'Gorilla' was removed from the Aquarium might well have been that some professional or amateur zoologist had consulted the chapter on 'Apes' in *Buffon's Natural History*, and exposed the 'White Gorilla' as a fraud, but in that case, the newspapers had nothing to say about it. The Aquarium

was quite a downmarket establishment, and the people thronging to see the 'Gorilla' were unlikely to have much zoological knowledge. Furthermore, the introduction of popular Darwinism seems to have given people a sense that in the development of species, anything was possible: was this extraordinary 'White Gorilla' not just what some Darwinists had predicted, a 'missing link' between human and great ape?

The last we hear of the 'White Gorilla' was that according to the 'Queer Pets' column in *Young Folks* magazine of June 1886, it was living as a pet in Mr Whiteley's house, together with its unshaved black companion.

Whether its remarkable docility had been the result of domestication at an early age, or disease, or the contents of the tumbler it liked to drink from, is anybody's guess. The RSPCA was active and flourishing in 1886, but the riff-raff surrounding the side-show and music-halls of the time had little respect for its teachings: there were some proper scoundrels out there, who exploited animals without any concern for their welfare. It would have served Mr Whiteley right if 10 zoologists had come to the Aquarium, each with a shaved chimpanzee on a lead, and demanded a total of £1000 for possessing other specimens of 'White Gorilla'!

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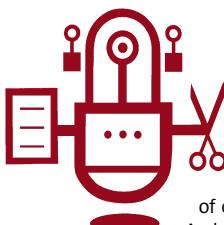
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## Clippers wanted!

Regular clippers have provided the lifeblood of *Fortean Times* since it began in 1973. One of the delights for the editors is receiving packets of clips from Borneo or Brazil, Saudi Arabia or Siberia. We invite you to join in the fun and send in anything weird, from trade journals, local newspapers, extracts from obscure tomes, or library newspaper archives.

To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: **1 Oct 2012**. If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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# Why Fortean?



**F**ortean *Times* is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. *Fortean Times* keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, *FT* is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

**FT** tos no party line.

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# PHENOMENOMIX

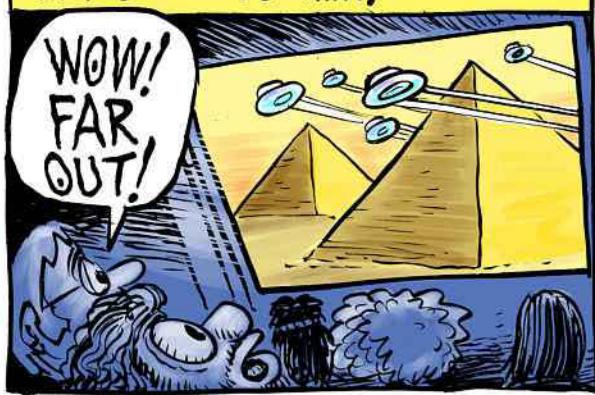
KENNETH  
ANGER 2

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

BY THE LATE 1960S, KENNETH ANGER WAS ONE OF THE COOLEST CATS ON THE PLANET!

HIPPIES LOVED HIM!

WOW!  
FAR  
OUT!



HE TOOK PART IN THE 1967 VIETNAM PROTEST, WHEN ANGRY HIPPIES TRIED TO LEVITATE THE PENTAGON...

OUT  
DEMONS  
OUT!  
OUT  
DEMONS  
OUT!



HE CAME TO LONDON IN 1968, AND MET THE ROLLING STONES! ANGER SAYS THAT THE STONES' 'SONG "SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL" CAME FROM HIS TALKS WITH MICK JAGGER...

PLEASE ALLOW ME...

...TO INTRODUCE MYSELF...



THE STONES AND THEIR PALS WERE IMPRESSED BY ANGER'S MAGIC POWERS-

ONE AFTERNOON KEITH WOKE UP TO FIND THAT ANGER HAD COATED THE INSIDE OF A LOCKED DOOR WITH GOLD PAINT!



KEN PERSUDED MICK TO PROVIDE THE SOUND-TRACK TO HIS MAGICKAL FILM "INVOCATION OF MY DEMON BROTHER"...

MEANWHILE, A MAJOR AMERICAN FILM STUDIO ASKED ANGER TO DEVELOP A BIOPIC OF ALEISTAIR CROWLEY...



IT NEVER HAPPENED.

KENNETH ANGER WAS ALSO CHUMS WITH ANOTHER FAMOUS CROWLEY FAN - JIMMY PAGE OUT OF LED ZEPPELIN!

PAGE OWNED CROWLEY'S MANSION, BOLESKINE MANOR, AND HAD BEEN TROUBLED BY A HEADLESS GHOST... KEN STEPPED IN...



PAGE AGREED TO WRITE THE MUSIC FOR ANGER'S NEXT FILM, "LUCIFER RISING".... HE INVITED ANGER TO LIVE IN HIS LONDON HOUSE...



BUT THEY SOON FELL OUT! JIMMY PAGE'S WIFE (MRS. PAGE) CALLED THE POLICE TO HAVE THE MAGUS EVICTED...



YOU'LL REGRET THIS, PAGE! I'M JUST ABOUT READY TO THROW A KING SIZE K.A. KURSE! JUST WATCH IT!

NEXT!! ANGER IN THE EIGHTIES!  
LUCIFER RISING!!  
ADVENTURES WITH MICKEY MOUSE!!!

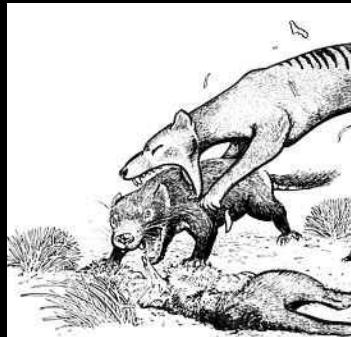
# COMING NEXT MONTH



CATHERINETTE RINGS STEAMPUNK

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OF A FANTASTIC GENRE



## ON THE PROWL

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GIRT DOG OF ENNERDALE



FANTHORPE FICTION,  
HUMAN MONKEY,  
STONE RAINS  
AND MUCH MORE...

# FORTEAN TIMES 295

ON SALE 8 NOVEMBER



HUGO PIETTE

## TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

### NOVEMBER 1982

Kenneth Hampson was driving along a bush road just north of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe when a cobra that had somehow got into his car spat a jet of venom into his eyes. Cobra venom has been known to cause blindness.

A bystander, who must have seen the attack, managed to pull Hampson from his car and pushed him towards his wife, who was breastfeeding a baby at that moment. "The man then ordered his wife to squirt some milk into my eyes," Hampson later told reporters. According to local belief, breast milk can neutralise the toxins in snake venom, and it worked.

**FT39:26-27**

As far as we know, the last modern discovery of a frog imprisoned in rock happened this month in New Zealand's North Island. A gang was carving a railway cutting through sedimentary mudstone to the south of Te Kuiti when a workman noticed that an exposed rock some 13ft (4m) down had split, revealing a cavity. Peering closely, he saw a small frog inside. It was alive and "moist" said Mr L Andrews, the supervisor, who put it carefully up on a bank. Sometime later, a drilling machine exposed another frog in the same way. This too was placed on the bank. Andrews said that neither frog could have fallen with loose rock into the places where they were found. **FT40:7**

In Iceland, a young woman and a middle-aged sailor were shocked when they each received a letter from the Ministry of Justice confirming their marriage. Their only encounter had been in a bar in Reykjavik when their impromptu drinking session was interrupted by a *gode* – a high priest of the pagan Aesir cult – who had downed most of a bottle of the potent Icelandic brew Black Death. The blotto *gode* convinced them that they should get married in the old Viking way, which he performed outside the parliament building, witnessed by other merrymakers. It seemed like a good idea at the time; the priest must have posted off an official record of the ceremony.

The Aesir cult was subject to a ban on public worship by heathens from AD 1000 until 1874, when the prohibition was revoked. It gained the full privileges of a church in 1972. **FT43:46**

### NOVEMBER 1992

On the night of the 20th, Windsor Castle – to the west of London and possibly the largest inhabited castle

in the world – was partially razed by fire. Damage to artworks was minimal – two 18th century tapestries were lost. The Rev Tony Higton, rector of Hawkwell in Essex, promptly wrote to the *Christian Herald* that this was divine judgment upon the royal family because the Queen "has persisted in multi-faith worship" when her coronation included "a very solemn vow to uphold the Protestant, Reformed Faith established by law". To underline this, the cleric pointed out that the fire had started in the Queen's private chapel.

A week later, fire demolished a wing of the Hofburg palace in Vienna, formerly the Hapsburg imperial seat, causing damage estimated at £30 million. Neither palace was insured because the premiums were too high. **FT67:8**

In Malaga, Spain, police were hunting a rapist with two penises who had held a woman prisoner in his car for four hours. She was able to give the police a very precise description because, she said, she had been forced to fellate him. José Lopez, 26, was arrested and positively identified by the victim – before being released. Just why is not explained. **FT67:15**

### NOVEMBER 2002

The month opened in New Zealand's North Island with a new highway scheme across a swamp being halted when members of the Ngati Naho tribe said it would upset Karu Tahi ('One-Eyed'), the *taniwha* – a serpent-like guardian spirit – that lived there. Maori spokeswoman Brenda Maxwell said that the local *taniwha* had caused serious vehicle accidents and ground subsidence – costing more than \$56 million – on the planned four-lane Waikato expressway and asked for the extension to be routed south of the swamp for fear of more calamities.

In Maori legend each bend of a river and prominent landscape feature can have their own *taniwha* guardians. The last we heard, negotiations were promised.

**FT167:8**

According to an Iranian newspaper, a man strode confidently into a bank in Teheran and began to help himself to wads of banknotes. He was quickly overpowered. In court, he said he had paid a 'holy man' the equivalent of £400 to make him invisible so that he could become rich.

We've recorded many similar scams over the years and they all exploit the greed of the credulous. **FT167:8**

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by Shelley Bowers

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